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Police HQ may be leaving downtown

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford Police Service's headquarters may be moving from the downtown core.

During the first regular Stratford city council meeting of the new year on Jan. 12, council voted in favour of issuing a letter of intent to purchase the building known municipally as 10-52 Wright Blvd. — perhaps better known to residents as the old Scotia-bank building off the corner of Lorne Avenue.

The building is currently listed on Realtor.ca at \$14 million with 100,625 square feet of office and industrial space and over four acres of excess land adjacent to one of Stratford's industrial parks.

Although nothing in the agenda indicated this was for a new police station, when discussing the item council debated the pros and cons for the service.

"I do see the potential in the location, but I do have concerns that I'm not able to reconcile," said Coun. Cody Sebben. "Number one, I strongly believe there's no substitute for the positive community presence that comes with having our police headquarters in the downtown core. To me, moving this to the edge of the city is a big concern.

"Number two, by moving the police headquarters, along with other municipal administration, outside of the downtown core, we could possibly be removing many potential patrons from stores and restaurants and moving them to the periphery of the city, while at the same time creating a potential vacant site in the core for an indeterminant amount of time."

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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Kylie Anderson and Sophia Aitcheson speed over the frozen tobogganing hill behind Stratford Intermediate School on Jan. 12. Despite a brief thaw, winter still blankets the region.

Soup's On raises over \$70,000 in one weekend for Alzheimer Society Huron Perth services

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Thirty-one years ago, the board of directors and staff at the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth came up with a unique idea to raise much needed funds for the local organization.

The famed Soup's On fundraiser has been a local hit year after year ever since.

This year's annual event took over the community hall at the Stratford Rotary Complex on Saturday, Jan.

10 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thousands of local Stratford and Perth County area residents packed the hall and there were about 30 soup vendors with enough variety of soups to cure anyone's appetite, all while raising money for a good cause.

Attendees came prepared with tart tins that could hold six to eight sample cups of soup, along with their own spoons (spoons were also supplied), so they could sit down and enjoy the various soup recipes dished out by those soup makers from area restaurants and

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Soup's On raises over \$70,000 in one weekend

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

organizations. Soup flavours included beef noodle, smoked chicken chowder, mushroom French onion, cheesy bacon cauliflower, coconut curry, chicken pot pie, cozy pork wonton and tandoori cauliflower, to name only a few.

Speaking with the Times, officials with the society said the event raised \$70,000 this year to support its programs and services.

In addition to tasting all the soups on offer, attendees also voted on their favourites. The results of the awards are:

- Creamy Amateur: Festival Hydro
- Hearty Amateur: The Stratford Chefs School

- Vegetarian Amateur: Stratford Winterfest
- Creamy Professional: Boston Pizza
- Hearty Professional: Chartwell Anne Hathaway Retirement Residence
- Vegetarian Professional: Soup Surreal
- Best Decorated Booth: Black Swan Brewing
- People's Choice: Gilly's Pubhouse.

Additionally, in the 50/50 draw a prize of \$1,970 was won by Kathryn De Jong and Marilyn Reidy from the Monkton and Rostock areas.

The Alzheimer's Society would like to thank everyone who came and enjoyed the soups while raising tens of thousands of dollars for society services. They also gave a

sincere thanks to the many volunteers.

"From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for your incredible support at this year's Soups On event," said Paulina Balch, volunteer coordinator, in a social media post. "Your time, energy, and generosity made such a meaningful difference – every bowl served and every smile shared was possible because of you."

"Whether you greeted guests with a warm welcome, helped prepare hearty meals, kept things running smoothly, or supported behind the scenes, your dedication did not go unnoticed. Your passion for serving others truly made this event special and helped us bring comfort and community to those who needed it most."

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(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Alzheimer Society of Huron Perth soup makers offer some of their homemade lemon chicken orzo soup, a very popular choice with many of the area eaters, at this year's Soup's On event on Jan. 10. All the money raised goes to the society's year-round and free services.

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(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Tavistock's Rozendal family come every year to Soup's On, including mom Lexi, dad Terry and daughters Jaeden and Jaxen.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The Stratford Police Pipes and Drums band performs at this year's Soup's On.

Police HQ may be leaving downtown core

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Coun. Harjinder Nijjar, who also sits on the Police Services Board, told reporters that although being located downtown is an asset, the Wright Boulevard building has a lot of potential.

“The building ... was built for a data centre, so it was built to handle that type of environment, so it’ll need some modification, but not to the extreme of a new building,” Nijjar said. “I think it’s a great opportunity ... and also we support St. Marys. It puts us in a good location. More and more municipalities are pushing police stations to the edge of town instead of in the beat. I think we still require presence in downtown, but there’s great opportunity that we can have maybe a small satellite office in the core of the city.”

The current headquarters located at George Street and St. Patrick Street has long been overdue for more space. In November 2023, the board started the process of sourcing a new station or top-to-bottom renovation, but the space issues associated with the building go back far longer. Chief Greg Skinner has earlier stated he could find minutes dated 1991 indicating the service needed more space.

At that time, Skinner said the available and suitable space downtown – which is

preferable for police – was negligible. The current station could support renovation, though likely wouldn’t be able to add space on top of the building.

Though, only last year Insp. Jason Clarke told the board that every day more things go wrong with the building, with maintenance work piling up consistently.

Speaking on Jan. 12., Nijjar confirmed that it would cost at minimum \$30-40 million to renovate the current building to modern standards.

Another factor to consider are the courts. The current police headquarters also house the Ontario Court of Justice. Nijjar indicated that it is not a given that the courts would follow police should they move from its current location.

When asked if the board has a budget or timeline for a new station, Nijjar indicated it was still early days.

“At this time, no,” Nijjar said. “The city’s going to go take a look at (the building) and see what the costing is and if it’s a yes or no. ... If it has potential and it will meet police needs, then I think there’ll be further discussions on that.”

The vote to issue a letter of intent passed nearly unanimously, with only Sebben holding out. Couns. Jo-Dee Burbach, Bonnie Henderson and Taylor Briscoe were not present for the vote.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Facing long-documented space issues at its current location downtown, the Stratford Police Service may be leaving for a new HQ outside of the downtown core. Pictured here is the old Scotiabank building on the corner of Wright Boulevard and Lorne Avenue, which the City of Stratford just issued a letter of intent to potentially purchase as a new station. It is currently listed at \$14 million, though to renovate the current George Street station it would cost between \$30-40 million at minimum.

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Editorial

No New Year's resolutions this year



AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

I didn't make New Year's resolutions this year. In past years,

I'd think about them all December — how much weight I wanted to lose, whether I'd do Dry January, or maybe quit drinking altogether for three months. I'd set workout goals and protein goals, goals about seeing my friends more or not overworking. I had goals on goals, and I'd stress about them until I eventually decided they didn't really suit my life anyway — and then I wouldn't stick to any of them.

I think the overwhelm of the wellness industry is actually doing the opposite of what it's supposed to do. I think most people

who spend time online — on social media, Reddit, or anywhere we're constantly consuming other people's lives — have been tricked into believing that the only way to improve your wellness is by setting unrealistic goals, sticking to them perfectly, and then suddenly becoming the happiest, healthiest version of yourself. I just don't think that's how it works.

When I'm too strict with myself, I end up with a "screw it" feeling and don't even bother. The truth is, I generally eat really well. I try to get about 30

grams of protein at each meal. I usually work out three or four times a week, and I love to walk — you'll find me hustling around the lakeshore when it's nice out or walking the track at the Rotary Complex in the winter. I play soccer and baseball, and I'm even thinking about taking up beach volleyball this summer. I journal, I meditate sometimes when I feel overwhelmed, and I honestly feel best when I can sit back and say: I did my best today, and I'm pretty healthy.

I like going for drinks with my girlfriends and laughing over

too many coffees. I will always have peanut M&Ms or Doritos on hand while I watch movies. I used to feel bad about those things — but isn't the fun, not-so-good-for-you stuff part of wellness too? Trying to cut out everything "bad" only made me more stressed, raised my cortisol, and made me feel worse about myself.

So this year, no goals. No rigid plans. Just sticking with being the healthiest version of me — with hot chocolates in the winter and s'mores in the summer.

Navigating grey skies and icy ground to get through January



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

No offense to anyone born in the first month of the year, but January sucks.

The holidays are over and those of us who can't afford to

escape somewhere sunny and warm are pushing through our vitamin D deficiencies and seasonal affective disorders just to make it from one day to the next.

Sure, we may go into the new year with the best of intentions, but just a couple of days after the fireworks go silent, this deflated balloon of a month sucks up any motivation we may have and leaves us in a crumpled heap, grasping for that last piece of Christmas chocolate lost somewhere in the couch cushions.

Sure, we could go outside or plan an outing to boost our mood, but the weather this time of year seems to be a direct challenge

from Mother Nature.

"Oh, you feel like getting out of the house, do you? Too bad. Have some snow, rain, ice and wind instead, and go ruin your shoulder shoveling the driveway like you should have done yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that."

So, we resort to copious amounts of television and endlessly scrolling social media to distract ourselves from the world outside, only to realize the world outside is not only frozen; it's also on fire. In just the first two weeks of 2026, it already seems like we're heading for an even darker place than we did in 2025.

But all of this — all of this darkness, sadness, miserable weather and lack of motivation — is just January's dirty little trick. January,

with its grey skies and icy ground, wants us to focus on the negative. It wants us to dwell on everything wrong with our lives and the world in general.

Or maybe not.

Despite how we may feel, life for many of us isn't really that bad. When we choose instead to focus on the positives, on what we managed to accomplish, both individually and together over the past year, it becomes obvious there are sunnier days ahead. I am beyond grateful for the life I live, the people I get to live it with, the work I do and the communities in which I do that work.

I truly wouldn't have it any other way.

Maybe January isn't about looking outward to find what's wrong in the world; maybe it's

about staying home, surrounding ourselves with the people (and pets) we love and taking some time to care for ourselves. Maybe it's time for an internal reset so we can start the year fresh and focus on the aspects of our lives we feel are most important.

Then, after the Christmas chocolate is gone, the weather has warmed and we've spent however long we need on our journeys of self-care, we can re-emerge into the world ready to take on whatever challenges this year may bring.

And maybe, if we find ourselves in a position where we can help someone else who may be dwelling in the depths of January misery, we can use what we learn about ourselves to help lift them up as well.

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Rotary Wine Survivor live elimination party gearing up for another successful year

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The 2026 Rotary Wine Survivor live elimination party will take place Friday, Feb. 13, at the Stratford Army Navy, located at 151 Lorne Ave. East. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., with the live event starting at 7 p.m. Attendees who purchase tickets do not need to be physically present to win prizes.

Last year's event raised more than \$10,000, with all proceeds going to the Stratford General Hospital Foundation. Each year, the Festival City Rotary group purchases items the hospital foundation

identifies as priorities. Past purchases have included a hospital bed valued at more than \$10,000 three years ago, three new dialysis chairs for the cancer clinic two years ago and five maternity recliners for the maternity unit last year.

Wine Survivor has been a staple community fundraiser since launching in 2018, taking only a brief hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Festival City Rotary member Bill Helmuth said the high-energy event offers a fun night out for anyone over the age of 19.

"We always get a lot of good feedback

from people every year," he said. "It's just a really fun night for everyone, and it's great to support the hospital foundation."

This year's grand prize winner will take home 50 bottles of wine. Other prizes include 30 bottles of wine for one winner, 20 bottles of wine for six winners. All remaining participants will be eligible to win one of eight \$25 LCBO gift cards.

Some of the wine has been donated by local vineyards, while other bottles are purchased by Festival City Rotary. The main sponsor this year is Orr Insurance.

The event will feature a cash bar, a live

gift card wall, live music and plenty of wine, cheese and snacks. A silent auction will also run throughout the evening and will include meat boxes donated by local farmers.

During the night, the band pauses as organizers draw names in batches for elimination rounds. When names are called, participants find out whether they remain in the competition or have been eliminated from the running to win wine.

Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased in-person from rotary members, by email at tickets@festivalcityrotary.ca or by calling 519-274-2134.

Stratford CFUW and City of Stratford to host panel discussion on intimate partner violence at city hall

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Stratford and area residents will have the opportunity to discuss how they can best help victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their own lives during a panel discussion hosted by the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) Stratford and the City of Stratford at the end of the month.

To be hosted inside the Stratford City Hall auditorium from 7-8:30 p.m. Jan. 29, the panel on intimate partner violence will focus on recognizing signs of IPV, understanding its impacts and learning how individual people and communities can respond to an issue the city and more than 100 other municipalities across the province have declared an epidemic.

"What (declaring IPV an epidemic) means is you're recognizing how pervasive this is in society," CFUW Stratford president Cambria Ravenhill said. "And it's not just a Stratford or Ontario or Canadian issue, it's a global issue and it has wide-ranging impacts across families in society. Traditionally, it has been

thought of as a women's issue; it is not a women's issue. It is much broader.

"So, this recognition from the city is very important, but then it begs the next steps, and those steps are things like survivor supports and housing, and improved justice practices, and engagement, and building coordinated systems. That's certainly not something we can do alone, and in Stratford we're very lucky we do have places like Optimism Place and Emily Murphy Centre and even Shelterlink that can help survivors, and we at CFUW thought we could be part of the solution moving forward."

After working last year with Stop Violence Against Women (StopVAW), a Perth County committee that works to develop prevention and awareness strategies for IPV, to spread awareness through a poster campaign, Ravenhill and other members of CFUW Stratford heard from numerous people in Stratford and beyond who were unsure how to help a friend, family member or neighbour who they suspected may be a victim of IPV.

Questions arose around how to deter-

mine if someone is a victim of IPV, how best to approach the situation and offer help, and when to involve police and other outside organizations. To help answer those questions and give area residents a public forum in which they can ask other questions they may have and share their own stories, CFUW Stratford partnered with the city to host this panel discussion.

Moderated by CFUW Stratford member Leanne Perreault, the panelists include Stratford Police Service Const. Darren Fischer, Emily Murphy Centre executive director Lisa Wilde, lawyer and Shelterlink board co-chair Alix Grice and author of *The View from Coffin Ridge: A Childhood Exhumed* Gwen Lamont. Each panelist brings a unique perspective on the IPV epidemic, whether it's working with victims on the front lines and connecting them with supports and resources or, in Lamont's case, drawing from her personal experience as a survivor and using that experience to fuel her research into IPV.

The panelists will each have an opportunity to share their experience with

those gathered before taking questions. They will also be available for a short time after the panel discussion to speak with attendees who have questions or want to speak about their experiences in a more private setting.

"This is not just a panel; people in the audience will be able to follow up on something they heard or ask a pressing issue, and then they'll have some availability afterwards if they want to talk with the panelists one on one," Ravenhill said. "We want people to be able to take away information and take away tools so they're not just feeling like a helpless bystander."

Ravenhill said she hopes those who attend will leave feeling equipped to recognize when IPV may be an issue and address it in a way that is both safe and in the victim's best interests. Beyond that, she said the panel discussion will encourage locals to speak out about IPV in the wider community, helping to remove the stigma that forces victims to suffer in silence.

To register for this free panel discussion, visit <https://tinyurl.com/4vzh3ve3>.

Stratford's Radio Cab to cease on-demand taxi services after February

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Stratford's oldest taxi company will be ceasing on-demand public transportation in Stratford as of Feb. 28, 2026.

Originally founded as 108, the company became known as Radio Cab 271-4242 on Dec. 4, 1960. For more than six decades, Radio Cab has provided reliable transportation services to Stratford and the surrounding area, becoming a longstanding fixture in the community.

Current owner Brad Rickert, who assumed ownership in April 2012, brought extensive transportation experience from his work operating Formal Limousine Service. Under his leadership, Radio Cab continued to thrive as Stratford continued to grow.

Rickert confirmed that the decision to close Radio Cab's on-demand taxi operations represents phase one of his planned retirement and is not related to operational or market concerns.

Importantly, the Stratford Airporter,

Rickert's other transportation company, will continue operations without interruption. A newly established division within the Stratford Airporter will assume responsibility for all existing contracts and will manage any new private transportation service requirements previously handled by Radio Cab.

Rickert expressed his sincere appreciation to Radio Cab's clients and the broader Stratford community for their loyalty and support over many years.

"Serving Stratford has been a privilege,"

said Rickert. "I am deeply grateful to our customers, drivers, dispatchers and partners who made Radio Cab a trusted name for generations."

The Times attempted to reach Radio Cab for comment but did not hear back in time for publication.

Clients with questions regarding current or future accounts are encouraged to contact Radio Cab's office before Feb. 28, 2026 at (519) 271-4242.

Perth County council begins 2026 budget deliberations with a proposed 7.93 per cent levy increase

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Perth County council has officially dug into this year's draft budget, which carries a proposed tax-levy increase of 7.93 per cent, inclusive of growth.

The draft 2026 budget was introduced to councillors at the Dec. 18, 2025, council meeting. It proposes to levy roughly \$27.5 million from ratepayers across the county, which is up by more than \$2.4 million over last year's \$25.1-million levy. The county, however, saw 1.76 per cent or \$442,000 in growth to its tax base last year, reducing the impact of the overall levy increase – roughly 9.7 per cent – down to 7.93 per cent or roughly \$1.9 million.

"As we move further beyond the inflationary challenges of 2025, the 2026 draft budget reflects a continued trend of easing economic pressures," treasurer Corey Bridges told council at its Dec. 18 meeting. "This marks a shift towards more financial stabilization and a more predictable planning environment. With no usage in the plan of reserves for 2026 county operations, Perth County is entering a phase of fiscally disciplined budgeting with an opportunity for strategic investment, turning the corner after a couple of challenging fiscal cycles."

The total budget amounts to roughly \$74 million in spending this year, with approximately \$64.4 million of that spending in the draft operating budget and \$9.6 million in the draft capital budget. The net levy includes an operation levy of \$22.4 million and a capital levy \$5.1 million, the latter of which will be used in addition to reserve funds and government grants to pay for 33 capital projects slated for 2026.

"Major impacts related to the 2026 budget include winter maintenance and a shift of municipal-drains funding from operations to capital reserves, as well as paramedic wages and WSIB impacts accounting for the majority of the 2026 draft increase in operations (costs)," Bridges said.

"... We continue to increase winter-maintenance expenses to ensure the county is maintaining our budget, as well as trying to generate a surplus within that depleted winter-maintenance reserve. The increase in 2026 is approximately \$600,000 to winter maintenance. Municipal drain work continues to be a significant impact to operations, which is why our staff have moved the treatment of these municipal drains to be funded from the bridges and culverts reserve to ease the significant operational costs and smooth the fluctuations through capital-reserve funds. The reduction impact to operations is approximately \$860,000."

The county is also looking to hire the equivalent of two full-time employees within Perth County Paramedic Services, equating to an additional \$231,000 in salary and benefits. Accounting for COLA and non-COLA salary and wage increases this year, the total salary and benefits cost increase in the draft 2026 budget is roughly \$1.7 million.

For a single-family home assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) in 2016 at \$284,000, the proposed 7.93 per-cent tax-rate increase would see the property owner's upper-tier portion of their tax bill increase by just over \$81. Similarly, the county portion of farmland taxes for a property assessed at the average of nearly \$1.6 million would increase by about \$111; an apartment building assessed at \$807,000 would see a tax increase of just over \$230; a small retail commercial property assessed at \$211,000 would see an increase of \$75; and a standard industrial property assessed at nearly \$502,000 would see a jump by almost \$282.

County begins budgeting for additional \$10 million in costs for bridges and culverts over next decade

After the budget was introduced to council on Dec. 18, councillors returned to the table in the new year to dig into the 2026 draft capital budget in more detail.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

The Perth County Courthouse in Stratford. County council has continued its annual budget deliberations this month, which continue at its next meeting on Jan. 22.

During the discussion that ensued on Jan. 8, county public works executive director John McClelland explained the need to increase the county's contributions to its bridges and culverts reserve by \$910,000 this year – an amount included in the proposed \$5.1-million capital levy, which represents an increase by just over \$1 million or 4.3 per cent over last year's capital levy.

"Roads and bridges make up the bulk of this budget. Certainly, within all the county's assets, roads and bridges account for well over 75 per cent," McClelland said.

"... That being said, we do see some impacts that we'll be looking at down the road when it comes to bridges and culverts. Perth County will not be alone in this; this will likely be most municipalities within Ontario, if not Canada and North America. There are a significant number of bridges and culverts that were built in the 1960s and they will be coming to the end of their useful life within the next 10-15 years."

With 43 bridges included in the county road network, McClelland said 30 of those bridges were built in the 1960s or prior and will need to be either rehabilitated or replaced in the near future. Many of those bridges have already been rehabilitated two or three times, and McClelland said costs for both rehabilitation and replacement projects continue to increase drastically.

"And rehabilitating one of these old bridges may not extend its service life much more than 10-15 years, if that," McClelland continued. "... It's just not a great return on investment. ... However, our current reserve and funding levels are insufficient to replace all the bridges at their end of life, so we will have to look at some of these projects from a rehabilitation standpoint and we need to be looking farther ahead so we have better options to present to you for rehabilitation versus replacement.

"So, we are looking farther ahead, and we are also looking at funding models with which to accommodate this."

The following is a department breakdown as to how the county will spend this year's \$9.6-million capital budget:

- **Technology services:** Total spend – \$298,500; projects include replacements of fire radio equipment, network equipment, printers, a new server, Toughbook laptops for EMS and desktop and laptop computers, as well as an upgrade to the Windows server and client access licences.

- **Bridges and culverts:** Total spend – \$2.2 million; projects include culvert replacements on Perth Road 107 south of Shakespeare, Perth Road 163 north of Perth Line 8, Perth Road 129 and Perth Road 120 A. Preliminary design work will also be completed for a future rehabilitation or replacement of a bridge on Perth Line 20.

- **Roads:** Total spend – \$5.3 million; projects include 22 kilometres of road rehabilitation on county roads including Perth Road 130 from Perth Road 132 to Sebringville, Perth Line 43 from Perth Line 119 to Waterloo Region boundary, and Perth Road 135 from Highway 8 to Perth Line 39. The 2026 draft capital budget also includes the development of a transportation master plan for the county.

- **Facilities:** Total spend – \$522,000; projects include a number of capital maintenance projects at the county courthouse and work at the paramedic headquarters building in Stratford and the paramedic bases in Listowel and Milverton.

- **Fleet:** Total spend – \$845,000; vehicle purchases include a Class A maintenance vehicle, a Class B tandem truck and a Class C pickup truck and SUV.

- **Paramedic services:** Total spend – \$270,935; projects include replacement of medical equipment and AEDs, and the purchase of bariatric and pediatric restraints.

Perth County council will discuss the county's draft operating budget at its regular meeting Jan. 22.

Optimist Club of Downie Inc.

OPTI-CASH CALENDAR DRAW

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Dec. 23	Peggy Parks, Clinton	\$50.00
Dec. 24	Deana Langlois, Blackstone	\$50.00
Dec. 25	Gary & Cheryl Reynen, St. Marys	\$1000.00
Dec. 26	Ryker Ahrens, Stratford	\$50.00
Dec. 27	Lee Ann Huston, Stratford	\$200.00
Dec. 28	Kurtis Otto, Stratford	\$50.00
Dec. 29	Darlene Pullen, St. Marys	\$50.00
Dec. 30	Maxwell & Emmett Barter, Stratford	\$50.00
Dec. 31	Matt Voss St. Marys	\$50.00
Jan. 1	Alex Strathdee, St Pauls	\$50.00
Jan. 2	Linda Coddington, St Marys	\$50.00
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Jan. 4	Lyn Forman, St Marys	\$50.00
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Jan. 6	Bill Helmuth, Stratford	\$50.00
Jan. 7	Robin & Charlie Rossi, Stratford	\$50.00
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Jan. 10	Scott Langford, Sebringville	\$200.00

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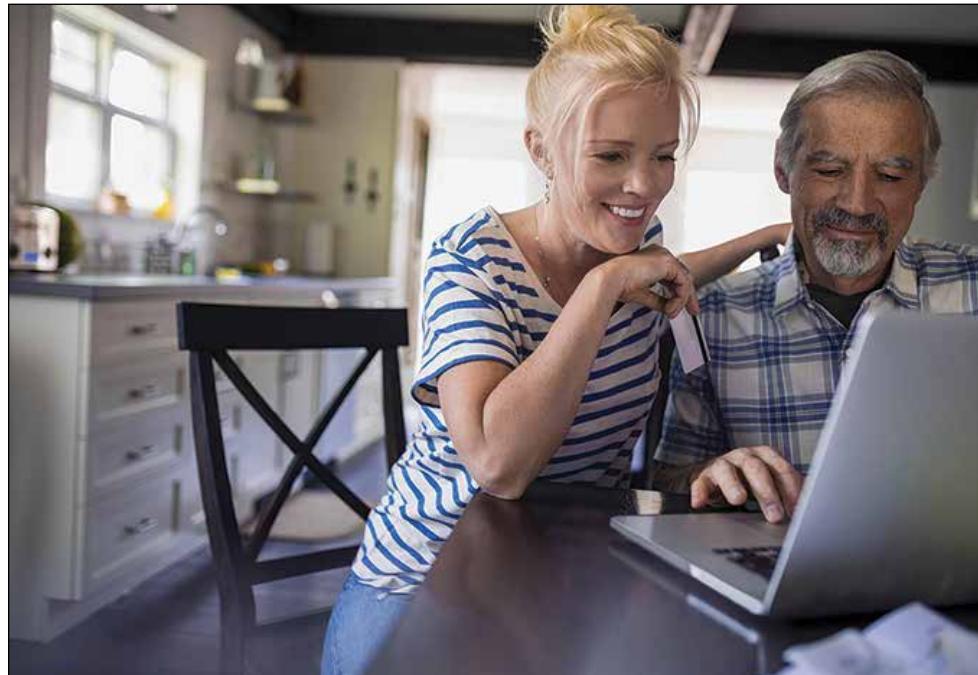
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A home-buying guide for empty nesters

The day a child leaves home can be bittersweet for parents. Although a son or daughter being successful and mature enough to move on to new opportunities can be a source of pride, parents typically lament the quiet that comes from empty rooms and a change to the daily routine they'd grown accustomed to when the kids were around. After some time, some couples decide to downsize to a home more befitting the empty nester lifestyle.

Downsizing presents an option for homeowners whose kids have left the nest. New analysis from a survey of 2,500 empty nesters commissioned by Regency Living found that 30 percent of empty nesters choose to downsize and move from their original family homes. When retirement is just around the corner, many professionals shift focus to how they want to live and where. Moving to a new home presents plenty of opportunities for older adults, including a chance to choose a home based on what's right for them in this stage of life. There are questions homeowners can ask themselves as they ponder if downsizing is right for them.

1. How much upkeep can I handle? A lifelong family home may be well-loved, but chances are it requires significant upkeep and repairs. Empty nesters may choose to move on to a home that offers lifestyle benefits like less maintenance.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Homes in lifestyle communities or those overseen by a homeowners' association tend to have certain maintenance built into a monthly fee.

2. Is this layout still a fit? Many empty nesters may not immediately feel the effects of aging, but before selecting a next home, individuals should think about aging in place and any unique needs they

may have. Opting for a single-level home, or at least one with the owner's suite on the main level, can be advantageous.

3. Can I make due with less square footage? A cavernous home with many rooms often isn't desirable for empty nesters. All of that square footage requires heating, cooling and maintenance. Rattling around inside a big, empty house may precipitate

the decision to downsize. Downsizing also can free up home equity, which can be used to fund retirement needs.

4. Which features do you desire? Many empty nesters want the next home to focus on some luxury items they may have bypassed in the first home when priorities lay elsewhere. Upscale environments like gourmet kitchens, spa-like bathrooms and outdoor living spaces may be in the budget when moving into a home with a smaller footprint.

5. Will my home be secure while I travel? Empty nesters might want to choose homes in gated communities or condominium complexes for safety reasons. Should they opt to spend a portion of time at a vacation rental or second home as snowbirds, secure communities enable residents to leave their primary residence with the peace of mind that those homes will be less vulnerable to thieves.

6. Does this home have enough light? The American Optometric Association says many adults start to have problems seeing clearly beginning at age 40. Homes with more light from large windows and artificial lighting can reduce accident risk.

Moving to a smaller home is a consideration for many empty nesters. Various features offer benefits to adults who want to age in place.

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STRATFORD TIMES

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Alzheimer Society of Huron Perth marks Alzheimer's Awareness Month with virtual programming

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Beginning this month as part of Alzheimer's Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society of Huron Perth is providing several opportunities for locals to learn virtually about Alzheimer's Disease, dementia, memory and aging and more.

During Alzheimer's Awareness Month each January, Alzheimer Societies across Canada unite to challenge dementia stigma and create a community where everyone feels more comfortable talking about dementia and sharing their own experience.

"For our Alzheimer's Awareness Month, we're just kind of highlighting three pillars," said Jessica Lawson, the local Alzheimer Society's public education coordinator for Perth County. "At the society here, we support people living with dementia and their care partners, and the three pillars are education, support and recreation. We offer client education and public education, we also offer counselling services and support groups and then, with the recreation side of things, we offer group recreation and then we offer in-home recreation services as well.

"... For Alzheimer's Awareness Month, the key message for Alzheimer Society Canada is 'Forget no one because no one should face dementia alone.'"

For the roughly 3,200 people living with some form of dementia in Perth and Huron counties, their caregivers, family, friends and the wider community, the programming planned by the local Alzheimer Society for this month and beyond is intended to reduce stigma by spreading awareness, support those impacted with information they need to know and create safer and more understanding communities for everyone.

Hosted virtually every January since 2021, local geriatrician Dr. Alexandra Peel is returning with her "Talk with the Doc!" presentation on Zoom from 1:30-3 p.m. Jan. 28. This year's presentation, entitled "Top Five Geriatric Papers with Dr. Alexandra Peel," will focus on hot topics and the latest research into dementia medication and treatments, following by a question-and-answer session. Visit <https://bit.ly/Doc-Talk2026> to register for this free event.

The Alzheimer Society's free, one-hour, online education sessions, the Dementia Basics series, also returns this month. With topics of discussion ranging from an overview of dementia and mild cognitive impairment to the common signs of dementia, brain changes and communication tips, the Dementia Basics series runs virtually over Zoom on Monday afternoons and evenings from Jan. 19 to March 9. For more information and to register, visit <https://bit.ly/ASHPEducationHour>.

Talk with the Doc!
Dr. Alexandra Peel, Geriatrician

**Top Five Geriatric
Research Papers**

**1:30 PM
WEDNESDAY
JANUARY 28**



(ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF HURON PERTH PHOTO)

Local geriatrician Dr. Alexandra Peel returns with her virtual **Talk with the Doc! Presentation over Zoom on Jan. 28.**

Beginning in February, the Virtual Memory and Aging program is the online version of the local Alzheimer Society's popular Memory and Aging Course. Running over Zoom every Wednesday from Feb. 4-18 between 1:30 and 3:30 p.m., the program covers age-related memory changes, how to optimize brain health and helpful memory strategies. While there is a \$25 workbook fee, the Alzheimer Society does offer some financial assistance. Register at <https://bit.ly/MAPWinter26>.

For those looking for a different way to improve their brain health, the Alzheimer Society also runs two ukulele groups as recreation and an opportunity for area residents meet and socialize virtually with people across Perth and Huron counties. The Golden Ukulele Group meets regularly from October to May and focuses on basic strums and chords, and having fun, while the Beginning Ukulele Group (BUG!) is intended for those new to the instrument, with virtual meetings held every Thursday morning beginning in March. For more information and to register, email jeanettes@alzhp.ca.

Finally, the Alzheimer Society is reminding businesses across Huron and Perth counties, especially those with an aging clientele, about its Dementia-Friendly Communities initiative. According to Lawson, this program offers training on how to reduce the stigma around dementia,

increase understanding and support those living with dementia to participate in daily life.

"There are a couple businesses like audiology and optometry clinics that we work with the staff – and we work with any businesses that are interested – in getting that training and how to make their business more dementia inclusive," Lawson said.

Any local businesses interested in receiving training through the Dementia-Friendly Communities initiative can email Lawson at jessical@alzhp.ca.

For more information on the Alzheimer Society of Huron Perth and the programs and services it offers, visit alzheimer.ca/huronperth.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the birthstone for January?
2. What is Canada's biggest forest?
3. In the Chinese Calendar, what is the animal of 2026?
4. Who was the president of Venezuela in 2025?
5. In what organ of the body is insulin produced?
6. What was the first single released by Phil Collins as a solo artist?
7. Street Fighter was first released on what gaming device?
8. What is Mr. Beast's real name?
9. What does the U.S. federal agency, ICE stand?
10. What is Canada's only native marsupial?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27



(ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF HURON PERTH PHOTO)

Pictured are the education coordinators for the Alzheimer Society of Huron Perth, Jessica Lawson and Jeanette Sears at the society's Soups On fundraiser in Stratford Jan. 10.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The civic beautification and environment awareness committee had its annual Light Up Stratford awards ceremony on Jan. 6 at the local legion. Ten residential and one commercial/industrial properties were recognized for their lighting creations last year. Pictured here, from left to right in the back row, are Jim Redfern, Keith Braby, Mona Thomas, Jayce Lovett, Chris Redfern, Melisa Redfern, Krystle Linden, Josh Munday, Jeff Lorentz and Eleonor Lorentz. In the front row from left to right are Debbie Comeau, Jeff Thomas, Carson Redfern, Sierra Linden, Cole Linden, Elsa Munday, Jamie Ramdwar and Mayor Martin Ritsma.

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Looking back, looking ahead, part 2: MPP Rae

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Although 2025 began with a turbulent start, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae said that there are some silver linings among the gray skies of last year – some sunny days too.

“I know some of the bright things I take from 2025 is that Canadians are proud to be Canadian again,” said Rae in a year in review conversation with the Times. “Which is great to see and really refocus on what it means to be an independent nation and province in the world, and understanding that we need to stand on our own two feet and diversify our trade, which has been a theme with (Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Vic) Fedeli and Premier (Doug) Ford in 2025 and will be in 2026 as well, as we go into the new year.

“But I think there is a lot of opportunity, and I think we're seeing that with some of our local businesses and some of the expansion that is happening, which is great to see in 2025 and hopefully continues into 2026. ... It's more important than ever.”

The on-again-off-again U.S. trade tariffs were the biggest challenges the province and the region faced, Rae surmised. He said he was pleased with his government's reactions, highlighting some of the financial support offered to local businesses to onshore production and to pivot around U.S. protectionism, both in the auto manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

“There were still a lot of American plates driving around Stratford during the summer months for the (Stratford) Festival and other cultural and tourism attractions locally, which is great to see that our American friends are still visiting us, despite the current U.S. administration not having such a favourable view of Canada at the moment,” Rae said.

From a party perspective, another highlight was the provincial election in February. Rae was re-elected to his seat at Queen's Park, joining his Progressive Conservative (PC) Party colleagues to form a third-straight majority government – a political dynasty which hasn't

taken place in the province since “Old Man Ontario” Premier Leslie Frost won his third majority government in 1959 (and his sixth consecutive term in office).

“It really speaks, I think, to our message as a government about protecting Ontario, but really listening to the people of Ontario,” Rae said. “... The premier is always famous – and I agree wholeheartedly with this – that the best ideas come from outside of Queen's Park in downtown Toronto, and I think that is reflected in our government's policies and legislation and why people and the people of Ontario continue to choose to re-elect the current government.”

Personally, Rae also became the Chief Government Whip, the member who ensures other members of the party vote as leadership desires – an appointment Rae called an honour.

Aside from protecting Ontario from external threats, Rae highlighted his government's response to aging infrastructure in the riding and the whole province. Locally, \$50 million in new infrastructure funding has been invested through the province and its local partners, which Rae estimated will help enable 4,400 new homes, and Stratford was successful in securing \$3 million through the Connecting Links program that will go towards major arterial roads in the city (the Erie Street and Huron Street reconstruction projects in particular).

On the subject of housing, Rae said that tariffs have affected his government's ultimate goal of building 1.5 million new homes by 2031, given that many of the materials used in housing starts are manufactured in the U.S., but they are focused on cutting timelines and streamlining on the provincial side.

Turning to 2026 and the year ahead, Rae said that he is most excited and anxious about the renegotiation of CUSMA, the free trade agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Given the sentiment of the current U.S. administration, Rae is concerned about a withdrawal from the agreement.

And, like last year, Rae is focused on continued infrastructure investment. Over \$200 billion of education, health care, road, bridges, public transit and



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae looks back at 2025 and ahead to 2026.

other infrastructure projects are slated to begin construction in the next couple of years.

“We know we need to continue to build for the future,” Rae said. “Whether it's the road in the Ring of Fire, whether it's hydro lines and other important electricity infrastructure, whether it's wastewater and

water for homes, or whether it's hospitals and schools across Perth-Wellington and Ontario, our government has made it a priority to continue to invest in the build out of a variety of social services, while maintaining a competitive environment for businesses to come to and operate in Ontario.”

STRATFORD WINTERFEST 2026
Saturday, January 24, 2026
Upper Queen's Park
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
 (Some activities Weather Permitting. Events and Times subject to change)

- 10:00 a.m. - Blacksmith Demonstrations begin
- 11:00 a.m. - The Eyrle Birds of Prey Presentation
 - Rice Krispie Square Roast begins
 - Maple Taffy begins
- Walking Tour with Stratford Walking Tours. Meet at the Info booth
- Winterfest run with Rise Run Club. Meet in front of the info booth.
- 12:00 p.m. - Sibling Rivalry Comedy Show
- 1:00 p.m. - The Eyrle Birds of Prey Presentation
- 2:00 p.m. - Sibling Rivalry Comedy Show
- 3:00 p.m. - The Eyrle Birds of Prey Presentation

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Unemployment rate increased over holidays to 4%

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Employment in the region increased by 2,600 (+1.5 per cent) in December, with gains in part-time employment (+7.8 per cent; +2,700) partially offset by losses in full-time employment (-0.1 per cent; -100). In December, the unemployment rate in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula economic region increased by 0.1 percentage points to 4 per cent even. Meanwhile, the provincial unemployment rate decreased 0.2 percentage points this month to 7 per cent, both unadjusted for seasonality. Employment in the region increased in the goods-producing sector (+2.1 per cent; +1,400) as well as increased in the services-producing sector (+1.1 per cent; +1,200).

In December, the region's overall population aged 15+ increased by +200 whereas the labour force size increased by 3,000 people, resulting in the number of people not in the labour force in the region to decrease by 2,800. This increased the region's participation rate up by 1.0 percentage points to 62.8 per cent, the highest for the region in the 2025 calendar year.

The goods-producing sector saw an increase in overall employment numbers in December (+1,400, +2.1 per cent), with gains experienced in agriculture (+1,200, +11.1 per cent), followed by utilities (+800, +6.7 per cent) and construction (+800, +3.3 per cent). On the other hand, manufacturing experienced an employment decrease (-1,400, -7.8 per cent).

Overall employment in the ser-

vices-producing sector saw an increase of +1.1 per cent (+1,200 people) in December. Other services (except public administration) experienced the largest percentage growth (+1,400, +15 per cent) in employment followed by educational services (+600, +7.4 per cent), finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing (+300, +6.3 per cent) and health care and social assistance (+1,300, +5.3 per cent). On the other hand, public administration experienced the biggest percentage decrease in employment (-700, -14 per cent), followed by professional, scientific and technical services (-1,200, -9.3 per cent) and information, culture and recreation (-500, -7.8 per cent) and transportation and warehousing (-200, -6.1 per cent).

"We continue to see positive signs for our region with the increase in participa-

tion rates of those employed or seeking employment and the decrease of those not in the labour force," said Dana Soucie, executive director for the Four County Labour Market Planning Board, in its monthly report. "As the year wraps up, we will soon finalize our review of annual changes and trends to be released in the 2025 Local Labour Market Plan in February. We look forward to seeing you at our virtual public consultation session on Jan. 13 where we will dive into these trends and provide an opportunity to engage in our findings."

Current job postings for the Bruce, Grey, Huron, Perth region have increased overtime since the pandemic and can be found at www.connect2JOBS.ca. The current number of job postings currently exceeds 1,200.

Respiratory illness season in full swing according to HPPH

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Respiratory illness season is in full swing and Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) is reminding residents that simple prevention measures can help protect the health of the community.

"Getting immunized, washing hands frequently, covering coughs and sneezes, wearing a mask when appropriate and staying home when unwell will help limit the spread of respiratory illness," said Dr. Miriam Klassen, HPPH medical officer of health, in a media release. "Limiting the spread of illness helps to reduce the burden on our healthcare

system."

Current surveillance data show that influenza activity continues to be high across the province, including in the Huron-Perth region.

Public Health Ontario provides up to date, thorough information on influenza, COVID-19 and RSV activity through the Ontario Respiratory Virus Tool (<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Da-ta-and-Analysis/Infectious-Disease/Respiratory-Virus-Tool>). You can view respiratory virus data, such as number of cases and hospitalizations, for the entire province and for the region.

Additionally, HPPH posts active local out-

breaks on its Outbreak Summary 2025-26 webpage (www.hpph.ca/outbreak). This summary includes all open and closed respiratory and enteric outbreaks in Huron Perth long-term care homes, retirement homes and hospitals.

Vaccines are the best way to protect against severe illness from respiratory viruses. Ontario residents aged six months and older are eligible to receive annual influenza and COVID-19 immunizations. Contact your healthcare provider or local pharmacy to ask about receiving these vaccines.

Select high-risk groups are eligible to receive RSV immunization, including adults aged 75 and older. Eligible adults should

contact their primary care provider about getting the vaccine.

Infants and high-risk children can get the RSV monoclonal antibody through hospital maternal child units and primary care providers.

HPPH is continuing to offer COVID-19 and influenza immunizations to children four years of age and younger. For more information and to make an appointment, contact the immunization team at 1-888-221-2133, ext. 3558.

To learn more about how to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, including information about immunizations, visit www.hpph.ca/reduceillness.

THE DIALECT(S) OF MERCY

In the beginning, God folded a pine tree into a prayer and whispered, "Here. This will be the dialect of mercy." It landed between oceans like a spilled secret, its rivers already fluent in longing. The snow arrived before the people. The snow was a prophecy. Hushed, unending, it taught the rocks how to listen. Then came the first people, who knew the syllables of thunder, how to bend silence into ceremony. One day, someone mistook kindness for emptiness and built a country from myth. Planted a railroad like a spine across the continent's sleeping back and called it nationhood. Gave it an unpronounceable name: Kanata. Canada. Can-adieu. Can-a-do? We were born in translation. During childhood, we sang hymns to maple leaves, offered blood to mosquitoes in the summer, learned to say

"sorry" with both apology and rage.

O Canada – where the winters are long, and the stories even longer. To be Canadian is to balance your heart in one hand and your grandmother's pierogi recipe in the other. It is to love a place that both embraces and forgets you. Half-remembered in census data, your tongue too twisted for the official forms. We are a coat made of other coats. A kaleidoscope patchwork of immigrant sighs. Every jacket smells like someone else's dream. Listen: being Canadian means navigating a forest of hyphens. Irish-Canadian. Anglo-Québécois. Afro-Canadian. Asian-Canadian. And Indigenous, untethered, hyphen-less. You carry your ancestors on your shoulders like snow piling on telephone wires. Yet still, you do not collapse. This land has room for contradiction. Some days I feel like a loon calling across the mirrored surface of identity.

My reflection doesn't echo back. We are a people stitched together by frost and irony, humour so dry it cracks your lips. We apologize when we bleed across someone else's floor. Say "eh" to fill the gap where certainty should be. Let me end with this: If Canada were a person, she'd be a woman knitting scarves from forty million snowflakes, her hands chapped from centuries of forgetting. She'd ask you to stay for tea, offer you a butter tart and advice you didn't ask for. She'd forget your name, but remember your mercy. Sing in two languages and dream in seventeen. And she would never say that she is perfect. But she would say: "There's room. if you're cold." And that, too, is what it means to be Canadian.

– Stefanie Lee, winner of local poet Heidi Sander's Canada Is Our Poem contest.

**STRATFORD
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United Way report tells local stories of housing crisis

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

United Way Perth-Huron continues to draw attention to local realities of the housing crisis. In a new report, the United Way's social research and planning council (SRPC) shares the voices of Perth-Huron residents affected by rising housing costs, with dozens of quotes drawn from a survey conducted in 2024.

"This report is an attempt to document the impact of the housing crisis on Perth-Huron residents," said Kristin Crane, director of community impact and research. "While we hear about housing all the time, we don't hear how it's affecting our neighbours, our friends, our co-workers. Our goal was to tell those local stories."

The report is called *Our Stories of the Housing Crisis*. It analyzes over 700 survey responses from Perth-Huron residents and lays out the major trends. Among other things, rising housing costs have left residents stuck in inappropriate housing, forced them to cut back on essentials like groceries, and degraded their financial

and psychological well-being.

Just as importantly, the report demonstrates that, "it is real people behind all the cries for help," in the words of a West Perth resident. Almost half of the report is direct quotes from Perth-Huron residents. That's because the survey featured open-ended questions to which respondents wrote their own answers.

"Our open-ended survey questions let people share what they felt was most relevant," said Crane. "It also let us capture their unique voices, their heartbreak, their wisdom, and even their humour in the face of adversity."

Those open-ended responses also allowed researchers to get a better sense of how Perth-Huron residents think and feel about the housing crisis.

"These stories have so much in pain in them and such a deep sense of unfairness," said Crane. "This has been a harrowing experience for many Perth-Huron residents, and they want change."

A common thread in the responses inspired the report's recommendation: that governments and community organizations should set ambitious regional targets



for new community housing and make serious investments to achieve them.

"Respondents want housing to be affordable. They support new housing, particularly new affordable housing," said

Crane. "That's a great project for governments, non-profits, and all of us to take on in 2026."

Anyone interested can find more information at perthhuron.unitedway.ca.

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Galbraith honoured, Warriors wreck LaSalle, passes the test against Elmira and snatched victory in Komoka

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors kicked off their week with positive news. On Jan. 7, first-year forward Coen Galbraith was honoured with the Western Conference Performer of the Week by the GOHL, as he led the Warriors with four goals in the two wins last weekend.

Galbraith shared his thoughts on the honour.

“Oh, it's great. I thank my mom and my dad. They supported me through some ups and downs and linemates, Donner (Dominic Marshall) and Murph (Grady Murphy), for battling hard to get me the puck,” Galbraith said.

Stratford kicked off the pivotal week with their last regular-season trip to LaSalle as they faced the Vipers at the Vollmer Recreation Complex on Jan. 7.

Colin Slattery opened the scoring for Stratford less than two minutes into the game with his seventh of the season. Galbraith continued to light up the scoring charts as of late with his seventh of the season at the 6:04 mark on a beautiful cross-ice feed from Marshall.

LaSalle caught momentum as the opening period progressed to its latter half and scored two goals in under six minutes to

tie the game at two apiece heading into the second period.

The score remained tied until Stratford retook the lead midway through the period. During the penalty kill, Galbraith passed the puck to the streaking Marshall, who deked the LaSalle netminder for his eighth of the year. With 4:21 remaining, Galbraith struck again with his eighth of the season as he tucked the puck in the LaSalle crease.

LaSalle cut the deficit to 4-3 39 seconds later. But the turning point of the game came when Stratford reestablished their two-goal lead. Jaxson Broda scored his first goal since February 2024, from Quinn Kipfer and Evan Arnold. Broda ended the game with a goal and two assists for the Warriors.

In the third period, the Warriors extended their lead with Jonas Schmidt scoring both goals in the final frame, and he picked up three points in his last seven games.

Assistant coaches Mike Knechtel and Dave Schlitt shared their thoughts on the Warriors' latest performances, who are outscoring opponents 21-8 through three games.

“We're starting to move our feet in the neutral zone and start to use each other a lot more, but that being said, we need to remember our own end at the same time now,” Knechtel said.

“So, it's awesome that the offence is coming, but we can't remember what gets us those wins also.”

“... Coming out of a Christmas break to get off in the start we have is very positive for the group and playing with a lot of confidence,” Schlitt said.

“Now it's like we're doing some good things to generate our offensive chances, we're four checking effectively, and more putts on the wall, and some guys have a really good start to their second half here and lots of confidence.”

The Warriors faced their strongest test to date against the Elmira Sugar Kings at the Allman Arena on Jan. 9. Before the game, the Warriors honoured their major sponsor, Hunter Steel, for their contribu-

tion to the organization.

In this tightly contested heavy-weight-like bout between two of the top clubs in the Western Conference, the Warriors got the upper hand at the midway point of the first period as Marshall scored his ninth of the season from Galbraith and Murphy. Eleven seconds later, the Warriors doubled their lead when Kipfer scored his ninth of the season from Slattery and Aaron Green.

Stratford increased their lead to 3-0 in the second period with a goal at the midway mark of the period by Green, his fifth of the season, from Slattery and Drew Hodge. The Warriors kept the Elmira offence off the scoreboard with their check-down defence and put in arguably their best defensive effort of the season.

Despite having Noah Bender's shutout bid spoiled with 1:49 left in the game, the Warriors preserved their lead and prevailed 3-1.

Bender stopped 27 of 28 shots for his 13th win of the season. After the holiday break, the Waterloo native has been much better in his last three starts than the previous three prior to the break, going from 4.98 goals-against-average (GAA) and a save percentage of .809 per cent to 2.00 GAA and a .907 per cent save percentage.

Williams was pleased with the effort shown by the team against one of the league's top teams.

“I thought we played a pretty solid game from start to finish. There were definitely some moments where maybe we weren't as sharp as we would like to be defensive,” Williams said.

“I mean, that's a really good hockey team over there, and they're going to have their moments throughout the game. So, I thought we did do a good job, and we got into a little bit of trouble. We were able to kind of hang tight and weather the storm.”

For Marshall, the win is significant.

“It feels good. We just beat a first-place team. That's a pretty big deal when you're sitting in fifth place. We battle hard every game, and New Year's is a new year for us. Glad to be a part of it,” Marshall said.

Hours before the game against Elmira, the Warriors made a trade that could provide an offensive spark. Stratford acquired Cruz Ferguson from the London Nationals for Jack McGurn and Matthew Blake.

The second year forward from Angus, Ont., Ferguson comes to Stratford with championship experience, having won the Sutherland Cup with the Chatham Maroons last season.

Ferguson has tallied 38 points in 31 games with the Nationals this season. Ferguson says he feels confident in being part of the team heading into the playoffs.

“I feel like with this group, I do think we have a chance. That's why I wanted to come here,” Ferguson said.

Williams likes the trade and is hopeful for Ferguson to provide the offensive spark the Warriors need for the playoff run ahead.

“Yeah, I think he'll be a nice addition to our group. You know, come back after Christmas here, and I think we found the net the back of the head a little bit more than we had maybe going into Christmas. So, I think he's going to come in and provide some offence for us. That's a good thing anytime you've got a guy that has his pedigree and his body of work that he's been able to deliver offensively, I think you're always looking for those consistent guys to come in and help the group,” Williams said.

“The other thing is, he's he won last year. So, I think anytime you're on a team that has that long journey to winning a championship, and it's never easy, and you must persevere, and there's lots of adversity, I think you can never have too many guys like that that have that experience. So hopefully our group can lean on that a little bit as well.”

On Jan. 10, the Warriors travelled through the blistering snow from Stratford to Komoka for their last road matchup of the season at the Komoka Wellness Centre against the Kings.

Schmidt notched his 16th of the season from Haden Frayne 31 seconds into the game to give a 1-0 lead. The score remained 1-0 for the visitors until Komoka switched momentum and scored at 5:01 to tie the game. The Kings took the lead at 12:07, but Galbraith responded for Stratford 95 seconds later to tie the game at two.

In the third period, Galbraith notched his tenth of the season from Curtin and Murphy with 7:29 remaining in the game, giving the Warriors a 3-2 lead.

From there, the Warriors withstood the Kings' offensive push, overcame a late penalty kill, and, with a timely shot block in front of the crease by Hodge, stole the win, their fifth straight, and secured 11 of the possible 12 points in the last six games.

Stratford Warriors					
2025-26 Stats					
(as of January 13, 2026)					
Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Jonas Schmidt	F	26	16	14	30
Max Wildfong	F	32	16	9	25
Coen Galbraith	F	30	10	13	23
Quinn Kipfer	F	29	9	14	23
Colin Slattery	F	28	7	14	21
Lucas Minard	F	31	11	9	20
Joseph Curtin	D	31	4	12	16
Dax Vader	F	30	4	11	15
Evan Arnold	F	23	9	5	14
Jack McGurn	F	27	5	9	14
Will Coward	D	30	1	13	14
Dominic Marshall	F	32	9	4	13
Aaron Green	D	25	5	8	13
Grady Murphy	F	27	6	4	10
Rhyse Brown	F	29	3	7	10
McQuen Haylock	F	30	2	8	10
Haden Frayne	D	29	1	8	9
Drew Hodge	D	31	1	8	9
Jaxson Broda	D	5	1	6	7
Mateo Craievich	D	22	0	5	5
Matthew Blake	D	23	0	5	5
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%		
Noah Bender	13-5-0-1	2.49	0.910		
Gage Hurst	8-0-1-1	1.98	0.913		

GOHL Western Conference Standings							
(as of January 13, 2026)							
Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
Chatham Maroons	25	7	1	3	54	165	107
Elmira Sugar Kings	25	5	2	0	52	149	78
St Marys Lincolns	24	6	2	0	50	135	70
Stratford Warriors	22	6	2	2	48	122	83
London Nationals	24	10	0	0	48	156	105
Waterloo Siskins	15	12	4	2	36	107	100
St. Thomas Stars	16	14	2	1	35	122	117
LaSalle Vipers	16	18	3	0	35	127	142
Strathroy Rockets	16	15	2	0	34	127	124
Listowel Cyclones	13	18	1	1	28	91	110
Komoka Kings	11	20	2	1	25	115	142
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	34	0	0	0	53	230

SDSS Junior Golden Bears wins the Lancer Classic

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford District Junior Golden Bears have won their third tournament of the season as they took home the Lancer Classic title in Windsor on Jan. 11.

In game one, Stratford defeated the Chatham's Ursuline College Lancers 59-40, followed by a come-from-behind thrilling 71-70 overtime win over the top-ranked Tecumseh's St. Anne Saints in the semifinals and won the title by beating the Windsor's Holy Names Knights by the score of 72-70.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The SDSS Golden Bears won their third tournament of the season in Windsor on Jan 11. Pictured here are Lucas Cassone, Graham Cassone, Ashton Van Kooten, Zachary Bannerman, Sam Ragogna, Landon Miller, Cole Weyers, Dilip Singh, Declan Martin, Brent Van Nes, Bilad Syed, Issac Brouwer, Koa Thompson, Chris Cassone (coach), Steve Rivers (coach) and Eric Steinman (coach). Absent were Will Heaton and Matthew Hughes.



Lakers getting back to winning ways

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Huron-Perth U16 Lakers resumed their unbeaten regular season form last week with two wins and a draw.

On Jan. 7, the Lakers travelled to Kitchener to face the Kitchener Jr. Rangers. Callum Brooks opened the scoring with his 15th of the year from Ethan Bridges and Wyatt Finch in the first period. In the second period, Declan McCotter scored a hat trick to increase the Lakers' lead to 4-0 before Kitchener got one on the board before the period ended. Bridges notched his ninth of the season from Brooks and McCotter to cement the 5-1 win.

The Lakers returned to the Stratford Rotary Complex for their two weekend home games against the Cambridge Jr. RedHawks and the Sarnia-Lambton Jr. Sting.

On Jan. 10 against Cambridge, the visitors got on the board in the first period, only for the Lakers to flex their offensive firepower by scoring five unanswered goals in the final two periods en route to a 5-1 win. McCotter, Brooks, Luke Mclean and Blake Moore each led the team with



two points in the win.

Following the game, head coach Jason Brooks wasn't pleased with the team's performance against Cambridge but was willing to take the win.

"Took us a while, obviously, to get going. We didn't get our offence going until the third period, but once we got one, we were kind of breaking the floodgates, so to speak," Brooks said.

"There were a few more to give us a bit of a lead that you didn't have to worry as much about, but at the same time, there's areas we want to get better at, be more consistent with our efforts."

In the final game of the weekend homestand, the Lakers' offence was left to be desired as they settled for a 1-1 draw against Sarnia-Lambton. Colten Van Geffen scored the lone goal for the Lakers in the first period.

With the results, the Lakers are currently in second place with five points behind the London Jr. Knights in the U16 AAA ALLIANCE standings.

Next up for the Lakers is preparing for the weekend tournament at Upper Canada College in Toronto, taking place on Jan. 16 and 17.

Aces aiming for playoffs; Cameron, Aldridge embrace chance

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The goaltending tandem of Sloan Cameron and Callie Aldridge has provided stability for the young Stratford Aces squad. Both Cameron and Aldridge feel honoured to be part of the organization.

"Being part of the Stratford Aces is all about inclusion, making friends and playing competitive hockey at a high level with your best friends, and also being able to achieve things, all together as a group," Cameron said.

"I played here for three years, and I've loved it. It's been my favourite – I played my favourite hockey here. It's all about making friends and playing competitive hockey and just being on a good team full of great girls," Aldridge said.

The Stratford Humphrey Fleet Service U18 Aces prepare for their resumption of OWSA regular season play this weekend, following their exit from the Mississauga Hurricanes 'AA Winter Showcase last weekend.

Stratford is currently in eighth place in the West division of the OWSA-Southern league.

On opening day, Jan. 9, the Aces defeated the North Bay Junior Lakers 3-0 and the Barrie Sharks 4-1. Despite the unbeaten start, the Aces dropped a 6-0 decision to the Etobicoke Dolphins and settled for a 1-1 draw with the Owen Sound Ice Hawks. Stratford finished in third place in Group C with a record of 2-2-1 but didn't qualify for the knockout rounds.

Head coach Sean Cameron says he hopes the team's performance in the tour-

namment will set the course for the second half of the season and into the playoffs.

"We had a good tournament. The good thing about it is that we met up with a whole bunch of teams that we haven't played before in the past, and it gave us a new experience. It's all about getting ready for what I call the second half of the season, which we're coming into. So, we're in the point now where we've got to get some points to make the playoffs. It's a big thing for us," Cameron said.

"In tournaments like that, we can work on what our strengths are and what our weaknesses are. So that's what I really focused on. Then we take it here into practice, because we have a big game coming up against Kitchener on the weekend, so we're preparing for that. And they gave us a lot of lessons from the tournament, how to get ready."

Netminders Cameron and Aldridge understand the situation the Aces face to be competitive in time for the playoffs.

"The season's been going well. It's a new group of girls, so we're excited to see where we end up. Hopefully, going to provincials is our next goal. We just went to a tournament, and we placed pretty well, and we're hoping to keep going and get some more wins," Cameron said.

"Yeah, I would say the next goal is making it to provincials and just doing our best throughout the year. We still have a bit to go and just winning as much as we can and playing as well as we can," Aldridge said.

This weekend, the Aces play on the road against the Kitchener Lady Rangers on Jan. 18.

Send in your sports reports

Coaches and/or parents are invited to send in your sports reports and pictures to the Stratford Times to let Stratford and area know how your teams are doing throughout the new 2025-26 season (and to create some great scrapbook material to be reflected upon in future years).

Game reports should be kept to a

maximum of 100 words. Please include a brief description of what happened during your games, including the names of those who scored and any special efforts made by your players.

Please have all reports and pictures in by the end of the month by emailing stratfordtimes@gmail.com.

WWW.GRANTHAVEN.COM

MINOR SPORTS **SCRAPBOOK**



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Gracie Neumeister releases a wrist shot from the blueline during the U15 A Stratford Aces game last Friday.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Elizabeth Uniac launches the puck up the ice through centre ice during last Friday's U15 C Stratford Aces game.

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(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Piers Murray blasts a shot on goal from the point during the U18 Stratford Warriors game last Wednesday.

Galbraith honoured; Warriors roll past LaSalle and Komoka

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Gage Hurst gets his eighth win of the season for the Warriors as he stopped 15 of 17 shots.

Galbraith continued to be on a tear this week with seven points. In the last seven games, going back to Dec. 19, the first-year forward has recorded eight goals and six assists and averaged two points per game in this span.

After the game, Williams shared his thoughts, noting the team's strong start and overcoming a disappointing second period to win in Komoka.

"I thought we were okay in the first period. I didn't mind how we got started. In the first, we had talked a lot, starting this morning at practice, and then kind of delivered the same message before the game, but we needed to make sure we didn't have a let-up. Because I think a lot of times after having the big emotional game we had last night against Elmira, there's a tendency not to come back the next night and play the same way."

"You're just not emotionally committed to the game. So that was a little bit disappointing to see our second period the way it was, given that we talked a lot about it and felt like we lost our way in the second period and kind of, you know, let them hang around and made it a tougher night, then maybe it could have been for us today."

Next up for Stratford is Jan. 16, when they host the St. Marys Lincolns at the Allman Arena.

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U18 Warriors gets a split to end homestand

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U18 AA Warriors continued to show progress despite mixed results last week against the Kitchener Rangers and St. Thomas Jr. Stars.

On Jan. 7, the Warriors were routed 8-1 by the Rangers at the Stratford Rotary Complex but rebounded with a strong 5-1 win over St. Thomas on Jan. 11.

Head coach Riley Mathieson shared his thoughts on the team's performance over the past couple of weeks since returning from the holiday break.

"I thought today's performance, we were able to get back to what we were doing before the Christmas break, which was taking care of our own zone defensively, and creating chances in the offensive zone by maintaining a forecheck and keeping the puck in at the blue line. As for the two previous games we had last week, they're against two top double-A teams, I got to give it to them. They're well-structured hockey games. They're physical, and they have a lot of skilled players," Mathieson said.

"I thought we competed well against them, but not to the extent that we would have hoped. It was nice that we were able

to get that practice there on Thursday night, spend a couple of hours out there with everyone, and get back on the same page. And that translated into the victory today, that we were a little more organized than we were in the two previous games before we had that practice, and now that we had that come out with, with urgency today and with the will to when we were able to get the job done."

The Warriors head to London to face the London Jr. Knights White in their only game of the week on Jan. 17.

Mathieson says the team is developing a new game plan for the upcoming game.

"We're going to look at building off what we had last week. Last week, we had to kind of cram things into two hours. We got a little extra time on the ice practice this week, so looking to kind of build off some of the things that we were doing and introduce a couple of new systems," Mathieson said.

"We worked on them last week, but they take a little bit of time for everyone to start understanding them a little bit better, so we're going to spend some time on that this week, as well as just developing our fortress and working on some positioning as well."

Hamilton's Steel City Rovers joins Stratford Symphony Orchestra for 'Under the Celtic Skies'

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

A very special evening is planned for Jan. 24 when the Stratford Symphony Orchestra (SSO) will perform the annual Celtic concert at Avondale United Church. Since 2005, the SSO has been performing this exploration of Celtic music to the delight of many audiences over the years.

Steel City Rovers are a group out of Hamilton, where they found their name, comprised of Ryan McKenna, Mark Fletcher, Jeff Tripoli, Joel McKenna and Devon Martine. Their music styling is Celtic meets Bluegrass and Americana folk. Brothers Ryan and Joel have been playing their adult lives in Irish pubs and making a living before growing the band to five.

"We also have Mark Fletcher in the band, and he has a really deep knowledge of heritage music. He's the sort of fellow who pulls manuscripts from hundreds of years ago, 200 years ago, dusts them off and brings these obscure Celtic writings to life. We've spent a lot of time in that tradition absorbing the culture and heritage but then also creating from that writing, creating things that we feel fit within that genre," said Ryan McKenna, singer of the Steel City Rovers.

Performing with an orchestra is something they have had the privilege of doing before with the International Symphony Orchestra. The prospect of performing with SSO is met with such enthusiasm for the heights that the collaboration brings.

"Standing in front of the orchestra as a singer, with one's own compositions arranged for a full symphony, all of a sudden everything clicks and you say, 'Oh, this is how music is supposed to sound.' This is a greater realization of the vision that I had in my heart when I wrote this piece. The beauty of an orchestra is how it can flesh out ideas and seem in a way



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
Celtic music meets the symphony in the upcoming concert "Under the Celtic Skies," performed Jan. 24 when the Steel City Rovers (pictured) are guests of the Stratford Symphony Orchestra.

that, you know, a five-piece band simply can't, so it's an absolute thrill to have the music come to life in this way," said Ryan McKenna.

The performance will include pieces that have been performed with an orchestra in the past, as well as new arrangements to look forward to. Arrangements for SSO were written by Ben Bolt-Martin and Kevin Fox.

"One that is exciting to me as a vocalist is one that we've had most recently arranged freshly for symphony and it's called 'Today's Rain' and it comes from an old Scottish saying, 'Today's rain is tomorrow's whiskey.' It speaks in terms of what happens as we struggle in life and that hopefully it comes to be something beautiful. It's a piece that often gives me chills," said Ryan McKenna.

There are also exclusively instrumental

pieces to be performed. Another newly arranged song is called "Gathering at Achal-laber." It was created and arranged for the band by Fletcher and Bolt-Martin for the symphony.

For this concert, it will be all musicians on deck with a full membership of the orchestra on stage with full numbers, big strength sections, full stage. "We've had a lot of experience doing this for the last 20 years, so we've kind of found these formulas that work best and bring it home for audiences and heighten the experience and we want the band to have a great time with us," said William Rowson, SSO music director and symphony conductor.

"I've been going through all the charts, the orchestrations we've had with the band and they're really fantastic, so I have a good sense now of how it's going to work just from studying and it's nothing but promising," Rowson said. "These two worlds can make just fantastic music and it gives a great opportunity for artistry not just from the band but from the SSO as well. We like to show off, we like to show people what we can do to express ourselves and I hope the audience comes out of this show with really high spirits feeling really glad they came and being very proud of what their community can do."

This won't be your average Kitchen Ceilidh. There will be two performances Jan. 24, one at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., both at Avondale United Church. Tickets are available online at stratfordsymphony.ca

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Stratford Winter Film Festival promises a quality experience for all tastes

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The third annual edition of the Stratford Winter Film Festival (SWFF) is shaping up to be an eclectic mix of comedies, documentaries and foreign films to cover something for everyone. Films curated are highly acclaimed and recently produced bringing an experience current to the times with relevant choices.

Movie goers can look forward to nine films over three days beginning Friday, Feb. 6 with a ticketed opening night Gala in advance of the screening of the film *Blue Moon*, starring Ethan Hawke as Lorenzo Hart, the celebrated American lyricist and half of the songwriting team Rodgers and Hart. The film, directed by Richard Linklater, was released in 2025 and received 14 awards and 46 nominations.

Ticketed access to the opening gala grants the opportunity to begin the weekend with fellow movie goers over catered hors d'oeuvres and beverages in advance of the 8 p.m. screening.

"Beginning at 6 p.m., it will be a long cocktail hour at 151 Albert St. and the move over to city hall. Always thinking of our patrons, we were a little hesitant to have it at that venue because of the distance to walk but I went and mapped it out and it's 300 metres, two blocks, so we thought, yes, that would hopefully be okay with the audience," said Craig Sangster, co-founder and festival director.

This year, the logistics of the weekend are simplified by using a single venue to

screen the films. City hall will be home from Friday through to Sunday, with nine screenings timed to allow for breaks in between.

"We think that the experience is going to be far less concentration on how do I get to the next movie to instead be 'Hey, this is a fabulous venue, these sightlines are perfect and sound is the best auditorium in the city.' We can control the light, so the sound and vision experience is going to be better than any we've had previously," said Sangster. "We enable more time to focus just on the film and to pop across the street or go to Foster's for dinner before the last show. You don't have to park the car multiple times, so we think all this is value-added."

Screening times for Saturday and Sunday are 11 a.m., 2 p.m., 4:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturday begins with the 2025 documentary film *Steve Shapiro: Being Everywhere*, exploring the remarkable career of photojournalist Steve Shapiro who documented iconic figures like Streisand, Robert F. Kennedy and various Hollywood legends.

The second film of the day is the comedy *Wicked Little Letters* directed by Thea Sharrock and starring Olivia Colman, Jessie Buckley and Timothy Spall – about small townfolk that start receiving letters filled with hilarious profanities. This is followed by the foreign feature *Vermiglio*, about a remote mountain village set in 1944. The final film for the day will be the second foreign film, this one by Radu Muntean, called *Intelgrade*.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Ethan Hawke stars as Lorenzo Hart in *Blue Moon*, the opening film of the Stratford Winter Film Festival screening Feb. 6 at Stratford City Hall.

Sunday's schedule begins with the heartwarming foreign feature *DJ Ahmet*, about a 15-year-old boy in a remote Macedonian village who escapes into music amidst parental expectations, societal conservatism and forbidden love for a promised girl. The second film is *Checkpoint Zoo*, which documents the daring rescue of zoo animals left behind enemy lines once Russia invaded Ukraine.

Third is *Fallen Leaves*, telling the story of two lonely souls in search of love in modern day Helsinki that meet by chance

in a karaoke bar but face obstacles in their path to happiness. The last film, *Meadowlarks*, is a 2025 drama about four siblings tragically separated in the '60s scoop that reunite for one week.

Tickets are available online at stratford-winterfilmfestival.ca where there are also trailers for each film. There are a number of ticketing options available making the festival very accessible. Options include full festival pass including opening gala, festival pass only or tickets to individual films.

Shakespeare's Optimist members learn about Parkinson's Disease from someone who has been diagnosed with it

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

When members of the Shakespeare Optimist Club gathered last week for their monthly dinner meeting, they didn't realize they would come away with a deeper understanding and knowledge of Parkinson's Disease like they did.

Shakespeare's Ron Harrison and Barb Myers spoke to the group and have studied the disease for the last number of years since Harrison was diagnosed with Parkinson's five years ago.

Harrison noticed a change at first in his cognitive and motor skills and was beginning to have sleep issues and his one hand could be noticeably shaking. He also began to notice numbness in his fingers and very little strength in them.

For Myers, his partner, it took her a long time to believe that Harrison could

have something as serious as Parkinson's.

Myers said she was convinced that Harrison had Parkinson's after meeting with neurologists, who ordered brain scans, and she began studying what to expect and why Harrison would be diagnosed with Parkinson's.

She soon realized there are many different types, some are faster moving than others, and because Harrison spent a lifetime as an auto mechanic, with all the fumes that can go with it, would that have brought on the disease?

The doctor and specialist thought most likely not. They were told that Parkinson's symptoms primarily involve tremors, muscle stiffness, slow movements (bradykinesia) and balance/walking problems, but also could include non-motor issues like loss of smell, constipation, sleep disorders, depression and cognitive changes, often starting years before ma-

nor movement issues.

The symptoms can vary greatly but progress overtime can affect speech, swallowing and thinking.

The couple have learned there are 38 new people diagnosed with Parkinson's every day, and three out of five are men.

Studies also show that there appears to be an increase over the last five years.

Mood swings, depression, anxiety and apathy have also been noticed, and are helped with prescribed medications.

Both Harrison and Myers know that memory issues, dizziness and sweating can occur.

They said a medication known as Carbidopa Levodopa is taken four times a day to boost Harrison's dopamine levels.

Harrison still plays golf three times a week and knows exercise is very important and works out when he can. He makes sure his golf game occurs in the morning

when his strength is at its best.

One instance that Harrison relayed to the group is he climbed up a ladder to help on his roof. He was never afraid of heights, but his body movements just froze when he didn't have the ability to come down.

He also related the experience recently when walking up steps, being able to see light between the outside cement steps also made him stop, and couldn't continue. Before Parkinson's that was never a problem.

Myers and Harrison have been involved in the Stratford Parkinson's walk for years, but once Harrison was diagnosed their team raised close to \$90,000 to go toward Parkinson's research to find a cure.

Myers assured the Optimist Members that all the money raised stays in southwestern Ontario.

Submit Your Letter To The Editor To Us!
Call 519-655-2341 Or Email Stratfordtimes@Gmail.com

Next season of Climate Conversations begin this month

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The City of Stratford has successfully reduced its greenhouse gas emissions down 20.75 per cent from 2017 – and 10 per cent year over year from 2023 to 2024. According to Felicity Sutcliffe, a local advocate and member of the energy and environment (E&E) advisory committee, it is proof that local action can be effective.

“It’s really working,” Sutcliffe said. “We want people to understand that it can work, but the city is a very small piece of the community. City owned buildings, city owned vehicles, etc, account for about one per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, and the rest of the community is responsible for the rest. The city can’t do everything on their own. We really have to have the

support of the community, businesses and industries and individuals, because that’s the only thing that will do any good.”

To that end, Sutcliffe was happy to announce that the next season of Climate Conversations begin this month.

Starting in September of 2025, a collective of climate advocates involved with the E&E and Climate Momentum got together to put on 10 conversations for community members to come out and learn more about what they can do – and how they can personally and financially benefit from climate actions. One occurred every month until the program wrapped up in June.

As Sutcliffe said, even after hours of conversations and topics and expert advice, organizers found there was still more that could be discussed. There seemed to be a continued appetite for the conversa-

tions as well.

This time around, there will be some differences. Rather than putting on each conversation themselves, organizers are inviting different community groups to lead discussions. There are four topics organized so far: the community climate action plan, electric vehicles, energy pro-

grams and waste management. Additionally, Sutcliffe said the Stratford District Secondary School Eco Club will be at an upcoming conversation to have a roundtable discussion.

The first conversation is scheduled for Jan. 21 at 7 p.m. in the auditorium of city hall.

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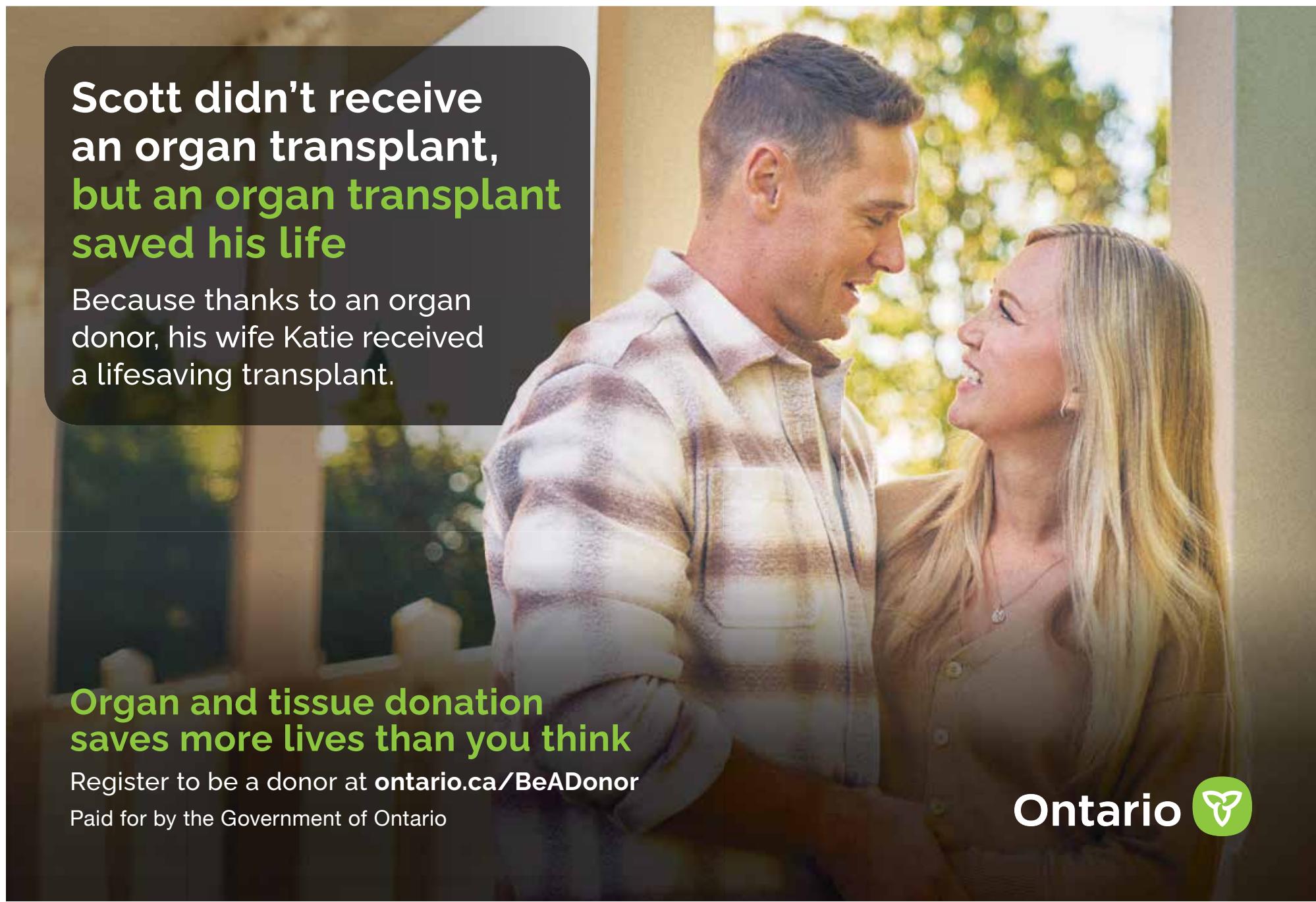
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Café Bouffon pop-up dinner series brings Argentine flavours to Stratford

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Those interested in a unique food tasting experience will have the opportunity to attend an intimate, one-night-only culinary event when Café Bouffon hosts its latest pop-up dinner on Thursday, Jan. 29.

The event, titled *A Study of Argentina: Cocina y Vin*, features a five-course tasting menu with wine pairings inspired by traditional Argentinian home cooking. The evening will be led by sous chef Joaquin Garcia, with curated regional wine pairings presented by sommelier Steve Doyle.

What makes this particular pop-up especially meaningful is the personal connection behind the menu. For the Jan. 29 dinner, Garcia will be joined in the kitchen by his father, Gus Garcia, who recently graduated from the Stratford Chefs School and will serve as sous chef for the evening.

Joaquin Garcia developed the menu based on traditional family recipes, drawing from his background and experience with Argentinian cuisine. The dishes reflect classic flavours and techniques, offering diners a culinary experience that's unique to Joaquin Garcia.

"I'm excited to work with my dad because all of the recipes are ones that I learned from him and my mom," said Joaquin Garcia. "I wouldn't know anything about Argentinian food if it weren't for them."

Joaquin Garcia says he expects the evening to go well and admittedly he's a bit nervous about being his dad's boss for the night, he's ultimately excited to see how it all comes together.

"I'm actually really excited to see how my dad reacts in the kitchen," he said. "I think it will also be nice for him to see me in this leadership role. I don't think he's



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
Sous chef Joaquin Garcia and his father Gus Garcia enjoying home Argentina cooking ahead of Café Bouffon's pop-up dinner series where the pair will work together to serve attendees at the Jan. 29 event.

ever really pictured it before."

Head chef Isaac McCabe will also be on hand, allowing Garcia to take the lead for the night and he too notes his excitement in letting someone else step into his role for an evening.

"The pop-up dinner series are always a lot of fun," said McCabe. "It's nice to highlight other people's ideas and recipes. I don't think (the head chef) needs to control all the ideas at all times. I always learn a lot when other people are in the kitchen and are able to have conversations and bounce ideas back and forth between each other."

The evening begins with Chimichuri-spiced carpaccio, featuring a fresh herb and arugula salad topped with shaved parmesan. This is followed by tomato toast with burnt tomato, goat cheese, anchovy and chili oil.

Guests will also enjoy Empanada Mendocina, a deep-fried pastry filled with ground meat, onions, butter, scallions, egg, green olives and raisins, served with aji molido mayo.

The main course features skirt steak served with squash purée and beet purée, accompanied by papas fritas provençales — French fries tossed with garlic and parsley. The meal concludes with Argentinian rogel, a traditional dessert made with thin, crunchy pastry layered with dulce de leche and topped with meringue.

Café Bouffon's pop-up dinner series is a rotating culinary experience showcasing seasonal menus, regional wines and guest chefs. Each event is designed as a one-night-only experience, offering diners something new with every instalment.

The Jan. 29 pop-up dinner is priced at \$100 per person. More information and tickets are available through Café Bouffon's pop-up events page.

UTRCA offering winter PA Day event at museum

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) and Stratford Perth Museum have partnered once again to co-host a Nature School PA Day on Friday, Jan. 30. The event will be held at the Stratford Perth Museum in Stratford and is open to students aged six to 10.

Staff have planned a fun-filled day featuring snowshoeing, forest games, fossil identification, campfire cooking, bannock-making, discovering trains and more.

"We have such a great time at our PA days and we're really excited about what we have planned for our first one of the year," said Caroline Biel, community education specialist, in an announcement. "We will have access to an indoor space as well as the beautiful forest and meadow trails behind the museum."

The programming runs on Jan. 30 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with extended care available. For more information or to register, parents and caregivers can visit <https://tinyurl.com/mp58bufd>



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Head chef Isaac McCabe is excited to bring tastes of Argentina to Stratford alongside Joaquin Garcia for the upcoming dinner services.

Opinions

Public education needs an overhaul



BRUCE WHITAKER

Times Columnist

“The purpose of education is to equip our children with the skills to reimagine society for their generation.” Thought leader Graham Brown Martin defines the purpose well, providing a valuable measure of the success of our public education system. The question becomes whether our public education system truly measures up.

At the core of this purpose is teaching students to think independently and develop a strong sense of empowerment. Skills such as critical thinking, teamwork and problem-solving are

essential not just for personal growth but also for career readiness in an increasingly complex world. The catch? Most of these skills aren't being taught in Ontario's school curriculum.

Unfortunately, the current system stifles independent thinking, discouraging students from taking risks or challenging authority. Instead, it promotes a factory-like model established over a century ago, which focuses on rigid structures and standardized testing. This model, inspired by Horace Mann, was meant to train obedient workers, but it no longer serves today's complex world.

And how are students responding? Not so well. Students feel the pressure to conform to uniform expectations, which often leads to stress and anxiety. The focus on standardized testing and performance metrics prioritizes grades over holistic learning, making students feel like they are competing against one another rather than collaborating, which can diminish their sense of belonging.

The factory model was chal-

lenged in the early 1900s by John Dewey, a forward-thinking education reformer. He pointed out that schools weren't recognizing the uniqueness of students. He argued for an education that's all about active engagement where students aren't just memorizing facts but actually involved in questioning and discovering knowledge. Dewey believed that good education teaches us how to solve problems and engages us more fully with society.

As a former trustee, I recognize the frustrations within the system and the need for change. School trustees often act as gatekeepers rather than innovators, which discourages progressive candidates and leads to many uncontested elections. As a result, trustees tend to be older, many of whom do not have children in schools, and they lack experience in managing large budgets (exceeding \$300 million). This situation leads to an increased dependence on the director of education, with whom they are supposed to maintain an independent relationship.

Within schools, there's often a

culture of fear. Teachers are expected to fit in rather than push for positive change. Many courageous teachers speak out, yet they often encounter backlash for their efforts. While teachers want to make things better, they typically have to toe the line.

Teachers could be empowered to be better if there was a mechanism to share innovative practices within schools and between schools province wide. Additionally, ensuring teachers hear how they're doing relative to goals should happen regularly instead of once every five years.

Transparency in school boards? It's sorely lacking. Information is usually kept under wraps and not shared either internally and with the community. Schools and their departments are often "siloes," operating in isolation, which hinders collaboration, misaligns goals, creates data gaps and leads to inconsistent student experiences.

We really need education to be more open connecting with the wider world – climate advocates, business leaders and those fighting for economic equity and so-

cial justice should look for long-term solutions that involve our education system.

While some boards are surveying parents and students to understand needs and gain direction, these surveys are inconsistent, and results are rarely communicated. Improved survey methodologies and shared findings could drive meaningful change, and benchmarking schools based on performance could promote the sharing of best practices.

For too long, youth have been treated as mere tokens in this system. Now is the time to elevate their voices. Engaging young people for change is essential for their well-being and the province's competitiveness.

As parents, we must demand reform from the government. By working with policymakers and advocating for the changes we want, we can shape a brighter future for our children. Together, we can revolutionize education to build a strong foundation for tomorrow's leaders.

Next article – a plan to reform education – coming Feb. 13.

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Opinions

Hope without hustle: What January can look like with chronic illness



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

January arrives loudly. It comes wrapped in promises of reinvention, productivity and personal bests. Everywhere we turn, we are urged to reset, optimize and transform – to become newer, stronger, better versions of ourselves by sheer force of will. For people living with chronic illness, this seasonal noise can feel not just unrealistic, but deeply

alienating.

When your body lives with pain, fatigue, unpredictability or long-term treatment, January doesn't feel like a blank slate. It feels more like a continuation – of careful planning, constant listening and ongoing adaptation. And that's where many of us quietly wonder: Is hope still possible if I'm not transforming anything?

The answer is yes – but it may look very different from the hope we're usually sold.

For those living with chronic illness, hope does not have to be loud, ambitious or performative. It doesn't need to arrive with a list of goals or a vision board. Real hope, sustainable hope, often looks like steadiness. It looks like choosing continuity over reinvention, care over conquest.

Hope can mean waking up in January and deciding to meet your body where it is – not where

you wish it were. It can mean accepting that some days will be harder than others and refusing to treat those days as failures. It can mean building a life that bends, rather than breaks, under the weight of unpredictability.

In a culture that equates hope with upward momentum, this kind of steadiness can feel almost subversive. We are taught that hope requires movement, progress, visible change. But when you live with chronic illness, the bravest form of hope is often staying – staying present, staying kind to yourself, staying engaged with life in ways that are realistic and nourishing.

January hope might look like creating routines that support your energy instead of draining it. It might mean pacing your days, even when the world urges you to push. It might mean choosing one small anchor – a morning cup of tea, a short walk when possible, a

daily check-in with your body – and letting that be enough.

Hope can also live in boundaries. Saying no. Cancelling plans without apology. Resting before you are depleted rather than after. These choices are often framed as limitations, but they are acts of wisdom. They protect what is still possible.

For many chronically ill people, January also brings grief. Grief for the year that didn't go as planned. Grief for the body you once had. Grief for the version of January you're told you should be having. Steady hope makes room for this grief instead of trying to outrun it. It says: You don't have to be positive to be hopeful. You can acknowledge loss and still believe in meaning, connection and moments of goodness ahead.

This kind of hope is quiet. It doesn't shout. It doesn't demand proof. It doesn't promise miracles. Instead, it offers compan-

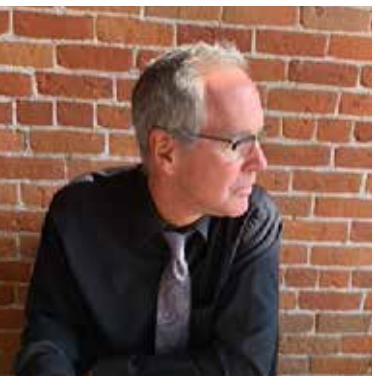
ionship. It walks beside you and says, "we will keep going – gently."

Hope without hustle allows you to measure success differently. Success might be a day that felt manageable. A flare handled with compassion instead of self-criticism. A moment of laughter or beauty or calm. These are not small things. They are the fabric of a life lived honestly.

As January unfolds, perhaps the invitation is not to ask, "how can I change everything?" but rather, "how can I support myself through what already is?" What if this month isn't about becoming someone new, but about tending carefully to the person you already are?

For those living with chronic illness, hope does not need to rush ahead. It can stand still. It can rest. It can breathe. And sometimes, that steadiness is the most hopeful thing of all.

UNTIL SOON. LIVE WELL: THE RENEWAL YEAR



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

Nature is perfect. Its persistence – inspiring, subtle and grand at the same time – and yet, for much of the seasons it remains an intimately hidden power. It renews all things, even us, deserving and so undeserving of its gifts. We don't always feel its preparations; we don't always see its seasonal dressings before we realize the season is already upon us. And when it comes, it comes in glorious bursting, like trumpets, or soft as a bow arcing pizzicato notes on a violin string. It comes in tiny buds and infinitesimal sprouts along the crust of the earth – revealed sub-

tly, as music is heard softly, over distances, emerging again and yet again. And always, mightier than weapons.

Uninterrupted, the earth and sky embrace, blanketed under a quilt of light and dark expanses of space.

Nature doesn't argue or condemn when it is wounded. It responds, because it is fair. What it receives, it reacts to. Maintaining life, seemingly incongruous with us at times but always symbiotic with everything in its midst – it doesn't force a harmony. It adapts instead, revealing its majesty. And in this way, it gives, so long as it is given to. Our mutual souls emptied, filled, like breathing.

How are we like it?

Both commonplace and unique, imbued with life and imbued with death – it is there that we may look for similarities. As part of it, we are organic and growing. Absolutely everything in nature performs a valuable function. We know this. Plants need no teacher, they simply "do" – purifying the air, releasing nutrients, providing shelter. Intricate activities moving like

clockwork magic beneath the soil. Living organisms altering themselves and providing for the common good.

And while some of us don't recognize or remember the pattern of our home, continuously and incessantly shown us as our own pattern – birthing, thriving, decaying, dying – we act as if we, rather than the pattern itself, will go on forever. As if we are outside of it and not contributors. It is our own pattern after all, year after blessed year. And like everything in the natural world, we contribute. Harshly or gently, we are part of the equation through our own longevity and decline, both personally and universally. We breathe in the "natural" world and act upon it, while we walk upon the bones of time.

And while we walk – we hope, we pray, we hypothesize that we will return from the stuff of our own demise, a rebirth from the energy of our own decay, as it is with nature. And why should it not be so?

What is our personal "soil" after all? In what does our renewal sit? Not in the decay of the body

surely. Could it be the firmament of the mind – the stuff, the energy, the spirit that has given us the ability to exalt ourselves through the way in which we choose to think? That is what separates us from all other material things, is it not? Thinking? Conscious awareness of ourselves? If we don't raise ourselves up through the soil of our own poor thoughts and into the light of fruitful and compassionate thinking, what are we but a walking indifference, hurtful machines who choose to shade our own unique gifts and each other out, from the enlightenment that makes the soil of our minds fertile?

And some might ask: Why should we choose our thoughts as fruitful and compassionate? And the answer is: because we are not alone. As trees have been discovered to be in communion with one another and actively help each other thrive through wind and roots – we too are in community. As much as we feel, believe or think ourselves to be alone – we are not, nor can we ever be. As social beings we will reach a tipping point, we will

sink or we will swim because of the way in which we interact or abstain from interacting. The earth is fertile, or it is full of poison. Once the illusion of "my land," "your land," "my property," "your property" is recognized – the soil of the planet may be clearly seen as the soil from which we all thrive physically. The mind too, is fertile or it is full of poison. Once the illusion of "I," "me," "mine" is recognized – the beating of the communal heart may be acutely felt – our common spirit from which we all thrive emotionally.

The renewal year is upon us once more. And again, the same question sits in the old years chair before we get up out of it, asking us: "How will you choose to live this year?" And we, as players in our flawed and glorious lives are implored to answer silently within ourselves, or perhaps not at all.

Stuart is a celebrant and the manager of Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. It is his privilege to serve, dispel myths, and give information concerning his field of compassionate service.

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Monday February 2, 2026, 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford

Featured Presentation: "Managing Rainwater: capturing stormwater to benefit the garden and environment", Vanni Azzano, Supervisor of Community Education, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

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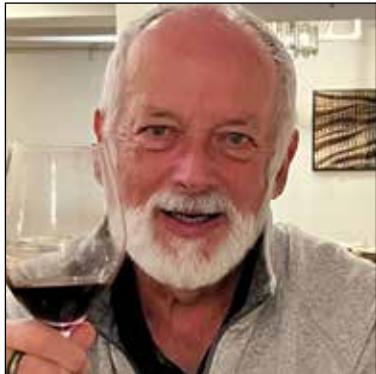
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North End Pharmacy
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Pick Up Locations

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Is travel safe, anymore? Where should we go?



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

It's not too surprising that, from time to time, I get asked questions about travel by email or in person. Once upon a time, they were either, "What are your favourite destinations?" or "We're going to a specific destination; can you give us advice about that place?"

But lately, there has been an increasing number of questions on a third theme: "Is it safe to travel?"

Good question. I know, personally, there are places on my once-upon-a-time bucket list that are now moved to a "probably never" file. The world is changing rapidly and for travellers, not necessarily in a good way.

But the increasing number of people wondering about safe places to travel prompted me to do some research. The results were intriguing. One much-cited, reliable study is the Berkshire Hathaway Travel Protection (BHTP) annual survey that polls thousands of American travellers who have actually visited the countries they comment on and adds data from other sources like the Global Peace Index.

So, according to this survey, here are the 15 safest countries for visitors, in order: The Netherlands, Australia, Austria, Iceland, Canada, New Zealand, United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Japan, Ireland,



Austria moved way up on this year's Safe Countries list, to be rated as the third safest country for travellers. Shown, the main square in the city of Linz.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Belgium, Portugal, France, United Kingdom and Denmark.

I find several things quite interesting here. The majority of these are in Europe. Canada is rated highly – number five among a total of 195 recognized countries worldwide.

And you may notice who is missing – the United States. In fact, this survey, which reflects the view of Americans, mind you – rates the U.S. as only the 26th safest country, with respondents citing challenges including violent crime, health access and risk of terrorism.

Another report, published by World Population Review, ranks the safest countries in North America (which includes about half of the Caribbean Islands). Here, Canada is ranked best among 14 countries, immediately followed by Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. The U.S. is near the bottom, its safety ranking only better than Mexico

and Haiti.

We need to acknowledge that while these reports are quite current, nothing can keep up with the challenges presented by our ever-changing global reality.

The BHTP report points out that "safety" is an evolving term. Where once it might simply have reflected the potential for being a victim of crime or terrorism, in today's world, it also includes how safe women, LGBTQIA+ travelers and people of colour feel. And those factors were key components in identifying The Netherlands the safest destination.

There are sub-sections in the survey, and Canada comes off very well in almost all of them: second in safety from violent crime (after Japan); second in transportation safety; fifth in "health measures"; second, after The Netherlands, in how safe women, LGBTQIA+ travelers and people of colour feel.

It makes me, again, proud to be a Canadian, and glad that at least half of my travel plans take me to wonderful destinations inside our own borders.

The BHTP report also has a "Safe Travel Hall of Fame" – countries that have averaged a top-10 position since 2018. Eight countries are on the list and yes, Canada is one of them, along with Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, Norway, Ireland and Japan.

These surveys – and there are many more just like them – and the worrisome headlines of the day all do suggest that travellers need to keep themselves informed before they make plans.

I am not suggesting that you should make your travelling decisions based entirely on safety recommendations, though it would seem wise to be as aware as possible. I do still plan to travel, a lot

– this page doesn't fill itself, you know – and in the next weeks and months I will be visiting the Dominican Republic, Italy, British Columbia and Newfoundland.

But quite honestly, I am also turning down opportunities to travel. To the Middle East, for example, and – full disclosure – to the United States. I have written dozens and dozens of articles about U.S. destinations over the years. Some of my closest friends and colleagues in the travel industry represent U.S. destinations, and my heart aches for the professional challenges they are currently facing. But just now, no, I can't go for all the reasons you know about, including the fact that the country simply doesn't feel safe for visitors – and the statistics back this up.

However, many of you will disagree with this, and I have lots of friends who have made their annual trek to Florida, Arizona, the Carolinas or some other warmer U.S. destination. I wish them to be safe and well, but I won't be dropping in.

And since I have become so darned serious in this week's feature, let me dive even a little deeper. As an old white guy, I feel the need to ask myself if I am comfortable travelling to destinations where I would probably be okay, but where my friends of colour, or my gay friends, or my single female friends would be in danger. Should I go where they cannot go? I think not.

All of these present-day realities have made my bucket list bucket pretty darned leaky. But it ain't empty, and hopefully, some of the holes will get patched up, maybe soon.

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and past-president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.



Canada is rated fifth safest country (of 195 nations in the world); shown are Newfoundland lobster fishers.



Travel by Canadians within Canada increased by as much as 10 per cent in 2025, a trend welcomed in every province, including Saskatchewan (shown).

Crossword

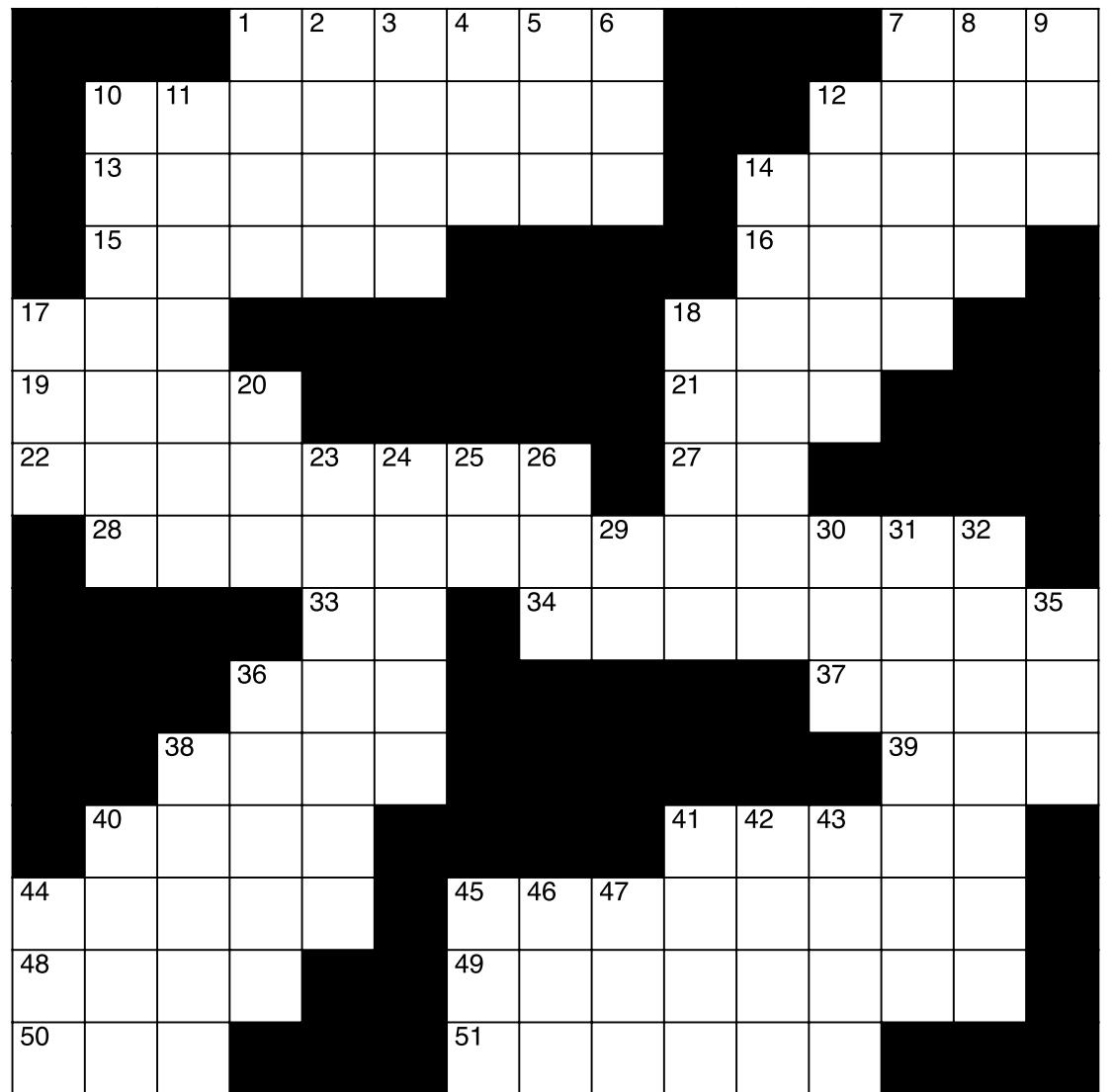
CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Mechanical lever
- 7. Rocky peak
- 10. Leave a country
- 12. Discount
- 13. D.C. ballplayer
- 14. Partner to “oohed”
- 15. Engine sound
- 16. Japanese ornamental box
- 17. Fido is one
- 18. Amounts of time
- 19. DiFranco and Phyo are two
- 21. Yearly tonnage (abbr.)
- 22. Make secret plans
- 27. “Tiny Bubbles” singer
- 28. “His Airness”
- 33. Morning
- 34. Perfected
- 36. Winger guitarist Beach
- 37. Abba ___, Israeli politician
- 38. Self-immolation by fire ritual
- 39. A way to save money
- 40. Pulpit
- 41. Make ecstatically happy
- 44. Once more
- 45. Works on
- 48. Nocturnal S. American rodent
- 49. State again
- 50. Expression of disappointment
- 51. Type of door

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Yugoslavian communist leader
- 2. Exchange rate
- 3. High school dance
- 4. Peter’s last name

- 5. When you anticipate arriving
- 6. Israeli city ___ Aviv
- 7. Goat-like mammals
- 8. Margarine
- 9. End-of-the-spectrum color
- 10. Make poisonous
- 11. Popular beverage
- 12. Actress Lathan
- 14. Where planes land and depart
- 17. Political fundraising entity
- 18. The distinctive spirit of a people or an era
- 20. Buffer used in microbiology
- 23. Light, open carriage
- 24. Metrical feet
- 25. Email subject line feature
- 26. A street with lots of nightmares
- 29. Rapper Rule
- 30. River in Scotland
- 31. One who settles a dispute
- 32. Most chummy
- 35. We all have our own
- 36. Arab tribe
- 38. Slap
- 40. Ottoman military commanders
- 41. Scottish or Irish Gaelic language
- 42. Emit coherent radiation
- 43. Sun or solar disk (Egyptian mythology)
- 44. Inclined to
- 45. Olfactory reference syndrome
- 46. Chest muscle (slang)
- 47. Body part



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Sudoku

4		6	9					
	3							2
					8	4		
		7		2	9		1	5
		3		8				
2		4		6		9		
				1				
	5				2			
9							7	6

Solutions on page 27

CLASSIFIEDS

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OBITUARY



RUTH ELIZABETH DAVIDSON

Ruth Elizabeth Davidson, a resident of Greenwood Court, Stratford passed away peacefully on January 11, 2026 at the age of 100. Born in Downie Township, daughter of the late Charles and Emma (Murray) Pepper.

Predeceased by her husband Jack Davidson. Ruth is survived by her daughters Anne Wilhelm, Sandra Herlick (Glen) and Karen Davidson. Grandmother of Donna Archer (Pete), Peter Wilhem, Michael Wilhelm (Jamie-Lynn), Perry Wilhelm (Jen), Pam Jackson (Jeff), Joe Herlick, Dan Herlick, Adam Herlick (Tina) and Amanda (Tim Metske) Great grandmother of Ryan (Heather), Marilee, Borden, Burton, Lexi, Mitchell, Alyssa (Cole), Josh, Brady, Jake, Lily, Avery, Carsen, Cameryn, Luke, Tyler, Brianna, Derrick, Lucas, Reid, Sophie, Alexander, Jackson, Makayla, Aiden and Wyatt. Also survived by sister-in-law Enid Pepper and many nieces and nephews.

Predeceased by her daughter Alice Bickle, great granddaughter Aaliyah, son-in-law Dennis Wilhelm, brothers Gowan Pepper (Velma), Lloyd Pepper, Johnny Pepper (Marie) and Bruce Pepper (Vera).

The family would like to thank the staff at Greenwood Court for their care and compassion.

A private family service will be held with interment at Avondale Cemetery. Memorial donations in Ruth's memory may be made to the charity of one's choice. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

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